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Browning's Women

Mary E. Burt.



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BROWNING'S WOMEN

BY

MARY E BURT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

REV. EDWARD EVERETT HALE, D.D., L.L. D.

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MARY E. BURT
1886

TO
JENKIN LLOYD JONES
AND
HIS FIRST
BROWNING CLUB.

*"Give these, I say, full honor and glory
For daring so much before they well did it."*

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PREFACE.

THIS book is written for the one who is too busy to devote sufficient time to the study of Browning's works to get at the poet's meaning. In it I have endeavored to simplify some of his complexities, to supply a few of the missing links, and to make some of his ethical lessons so plain that the one who has not constant access to a reference library, and who can not boast a college education, may easily get a breath of the atmosphere which the poet has created for us.

Knowing the utter impossibility of expressing his thoughts in any different language from his, I have aimed as far as possible to use the poet's own words, either in paraphrase or by direct quotation, without the too frequent use of quotation marks; if the reader will supply these for himself, he will find his book liberally dotted.

MARY E. BURT.

Chicago, October, 1886.

INTRODUCTION.

IT is a pleasure even to have it supposed that one can introduce Robert Browning to any readers. Certainly I am glad if I can say any word which will make any person read his poems who might else have passed them by.

He says, in a laughing way, that the British public does not admire him. So much the worse for the British public. I have been glad to see that, year by year, since we first bought our straw-colored "Bells and Pomegranates,"—ah! that was nearly half a century ago,—more people and more in America have known him,—and have of course loved him, honored him, and "admired" him.

In the pages which are in the reader's hands, Miss Burt has pointed out many things in the characters and lives of Browning's women which less careful

readers than she might have passed by unnoticed. The best good which she can do to her readers is to set them to study this poet, or indeed any poet, with systematic and tender care like hers, and not to be satisfied with reading as they run, or skate, or shoot along.

Whatever poem is really first-rate is worth remembering, returning to, and reflecting upon. I shall hope, then, that this book, to which she has given affectionate thought and study, will help readers not only in the reading of Mr. Browning, but in other reading of other poetry.

A common-place and stupid joke pretends that Mr. Browning's poems are so unintelligible that average people are wiser in not taking them in hand. For the fools who can not enjoy them, I have little pity and no advice. For people who have not tried, there is simply this to be said:

A baby can not understand Shakespeare. A Crow Indian can not read the

Bible. Mr. Gradgrind can not understand why General Gordon gives his life for a great cause. But you are not a baby; you are not a Crow Indian; you are not, let us hope, Mr. Gradgrind.

As you are not,—why do you want to pretend that you are?

Better say to the first fool who says he can not understand Browning, "I am sorry for you, but I think I can."

EDWARD E. HALE.

*South Congregational Church, }
Boston, Mass, Oct. 27, 1886. }*

BROWNING'S WOMEN.

CHAPTER I.

STYLE OF PORTRAITURE. PORTRAITS OF HIS WIFE.

God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her.

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN his portraiture of women Robert Browning has shown himself a consummate artist. His drawings are as strong and at the same time as delicate as the facts demand. His colors are fresh and true. His lights and shadows balance each other. In his enjoyment of beautiful lights he does not forget to paint shadows, and in his eagerness to paint correct shadows he does not forget the appropriate light that makes the shadows possible, as is the habit of less thoughtful writers. He does not ignore physical

charms,—taper fingers, white throats and ravishing forms; indeed he quite outdoes other writers in this respect, but he gives us more robust women than conventional poets do. He is especially susceptible to golden hair. But he never for a moment makes our interest in the woman turn on the pivot of her beauty, and often makes her homeliness speak in her favor. It is a superficial trait in an author to use beauty, high birth and wealth as methods of creating an interest in a character or holding attention to it. Although Browning is not guilty of using superficial and conventional ways of exciting interest in his characters, he does revel in rare types. The rare type is the usual one with him. He does not give us the woman that we commonly see, with her babies and other household joys and tribulations. Neither has he given us any good painting of children, although he has shown their amusing short-sighted baby-motives so naturally in illustrating other characters, that he has proved himself capable of handling the subject as skillfully as did Victor Hugo. A few lines from "A Soul's Tragedy" afford us an example: "The

sweetest child we all smile on for his pleasant want of the whole world to break up, or suck in his mouth, seeing no other good in it." He has given us all shades of mother feeling from the brutal to the ideal; but in no case have I found a sustained and complete relation between mother and child, that has no unusual or repulsive aspect. In this respect he does not stand alone, for it is difficult to find in standard literature a woman who has developed into noble womanhood through the continued and sympathetic influence of wise parents.

The greatest portrait that Browning has given us is without doubt that of his wife. There are three grand portraits of women that stand out, in my mind, above all others, namely, the portrait of Antigone, the one matchless woman of Greek poetry; the angel wife of Robert Browning; and the Beatrice of Dante. Dante expressed his wish to write of Beatrice as never man had written of women before; and I think the best critics of the day concede that Robert Browning is the only poet since Dante that has ever reached his altitude. In the portrait, or rather in the

series of portraits of his wife which Browning has given us, he has shown only what is grand and ideal. She is the "Lyric Love," the ideal or genius of poesy, the Muse through whom the gift of poetry has come to him; the ideal before whom he sits with bent head and beseeching hands, praying for some inspiration which has once been her very thought, some benediction which has once been her smile, before he may begin his song. Side by side with this spiritual vision he paints the woman, suffering in her sick-room which is all a blue and holy heaven, though made pale by her visions of the sufferings of mankind. In the poem "By the Fireside," he has given us an altogether human portrait of her, a portrait in fact, of both himself and his wife as lovers, and at the same time one of his favorite theories, which he develops more fully in several other poems.

"Oh, you might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair;—
Yet end as he began.

"But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word."

This theory is calculated to meet the approval of those people who rely on their instincts, and of those to whom time is valuable, to disgust prudish bachelors, to alarm cautious parents, to be the destruction of thoughtless young persons, and to prove of value only to people who have attained to sound judgment. Robert Browning is constantly making some amusing departure from the rules of conventional writers, and yet he dignifies the attitude, though it be to substitute a short courtship for the longer and more decorous mode of wooing. His ideal courtships are nearly all the matter of a moment or of a day. They present a curious contrast to those long-drawn-out hide-and-seek games usually dwelt upon by weak novelists, and which generally end by taking the honesty out of one life and the happiness out of the other, instead of proving the climax of bliss. If in any case Robert Browning approves of one lover using another as an object without sensibility or soul, a thing to be examined, criticised and forgotten, as some Browning students discover, he certainly does not teach it in the lines quoted.

In each portrait of his wife, I have already said, he shows nothing but the ideal side. She is always the angel borne on his bosom; her face is "God's own smile." But can a portrait be true and have no shadow side?—might be asked. Must it not be a monotonously flat picture that has no shadows in it? Must not a picture, in order to be powerful, have strong lights and shadows? Not so. It is possible for the strength of a picture to lie, not in the intensity of its lights and shadows, but in the truth and variety of its colors. This can be shown by observing people out in the open atmosphere on a foggy day, when there are no strong lights and therefore can be no strong shadows. By watching the various tones of color, tint upon tint, in their faces, it can be seen that form may be strongly and truly expressed without deep shadows. The atmosphere, enveloping whatever there may be in the background, creates a perspective that makes the picture strong and true but almost shadowless. It is the atmosphere which Robert Browning has painted into these pictures that makes the angel seem

an angel, all whiteness and yet all truth,—

“Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing songs unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.”

The portrait of his wife should hardly be classified with Browning's portraits of women. He has made it a sort of holy image on a sacred shrine whereon to gaze long would be sacrilege. We pass by the altar of his privacy and come into the gallery of “The Women of Browning.”

CHAPTER II.

INTELLECTUAL WOMEN.

"The learned eye is still the loving one."

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE first woman to notice in this long gallery of portraits is Balaustion, the heroine of two lengthy poems, "Balaustion's Adventure" and "Aristophanes' Apology," the largest, healthiest, happiest woman of the group. A creature of superb physique, a profound philosopher (except in love affairs,—neither men nor women are philosophers there), good natured but earnest, witty but serious, "wise but not sad," "glad but not grinning," what could one possibly wish more in Balaustion? She is perfectly natural, a far closer portrait of a real American girl than our own literature affords. If Browning posed before the mirror, as some say, in order to get his model,

he did quite an unnecessary thing, for Balaustions live all around us. She is a true girl in every respect, if Browning did paint his own attributes into her character. When she is introduced to us she is sitting with four other girls; they are all seated cozily together on the bank of a stream, their lips pursed up like crumpled rose leaves; they are listening to the story of her adventure.

She had read and even committed to memory the works of Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and like all girls, and boys too, who become familiar with those poems, had adopted Athens into her heart. Like Lord Byron in later days, she was inspired to take active measures in behalf of the land whose poetry she loved, and when the people of Rhodes, her native island, rose against Athens, she begged passionately of all who loved her, to remain loyal to Athens, which she still calls the life and light of the whole world worth calling world. It was better, she counseled her Rhodian friends, to go to Athens and die, lying outstretched before her temples or her gates for feet to trample on than to tolerate the powers

which were leagued against the beloved city. The feasts and fasts, the hallowed memories of the old battle grounds, the sacred groves, and above all, the thoughts of the immortal poets were hers to defend and theirs also if they had souls. She so wrought upon her kinsfolk with her prayers that they crossed the strait and found a ship whose captain was well-disposed toward Athens, and the like-minded were soon out at sea, pushing proudly toward their hearts' true harbor. But a wind which lay in ambush near Point Malea leaped out upon them, turned them from their course and drove them out into the wild waste of waters so that they lost their way. As they strained their eyes to discover what land lay ahead, they were startled by the captain's voice shouting to the oarsmen to row harder, because a pirate bark was following. They must expect no mercy from these water-thieves. The boatmen rowed furiously, but the pirates gained upon them until they could hear their threats and curses. Seeing the exhausted oarsmen flag in their efforts, Balaustion sprang upon the altar by the mast and sang the old song which had

saved the Athenians at the battle of Salamis. Inspired by her song, the oarsmen rowed with renewed energy and soon found themselves in the harbor at Syracuse, a city in league with Sparta against Athens. Before they had had time to take counsel together as to what they should do in this new and greater dilemma, a galley came out and hailed them, asking who sought entry there in war-time. The captain cautiously replied that they came from the main seaport of Rhodes, which, forsaking Athens, had joined the league, hoping by this indirect answer to mislead the Syracusans into the belief that they were not enemies, and so receive their protection. The people of Syracuse knew too well the spirit of the Grecian poetry and replied:

“Ay but we heard all Athens in one ode
Just now! we heard her in that Aischulos!”

The Rhodians received no welcome but were told to return to Rhodes. The Syracusans would have no colony from Athens to stir up the pale captives in their quarries whom a daily pint of corn kept in a state of submissiveness. The

venerable captain prayed them by the gods and all else sacred to them, not to thrust back suppliants but save the innocent who were only bound on traffic, yet his prayer was vain. Like tired birds, driven from friendly rocks by rude barbarians, to face the cormorant or ossifrage, they turned to meet the foe, but the people in the galley, who had been discussing some mooted question among themselves, cried: "Wait!" and they gladly waited. That song, they cried, was truly *Æschylus*, but might you know any of the verses of *Euripides*, the newer but not so famous poet? The Rhodians, thankful for this new hope, bethought themselves how *Syracuse* had opened heart at the first knocking of *Euripides* even before his own countrymen appreciated him; and had treated with reverence their captive slaves if they but knew one of his lines, bidding them go free and thank the poet whose verses gave them liberty. At the first mention of *Euripides* the gray captain shouted to his men to bring out the sacred anchor, and to *Balaustion* to sing them a strophe and save her crew. *Balaustion* begged to be taken to the temple of

Herakles where she would recite the whole drama of Alkestis—in which the laughter-loving god was god and hero too.

“Then because Greeks are Greeks and hearts are hearts,
And poetry is power, they all outbroke
In a great joyous laughter with much love,”

thanking the mighty Herakles that he had brought them this good holiday. They all rowed into the harbor, making the air ring with the name of Euripides, and all the crowd along the shore took up the cry until the whole city came rushing to the temple. There they stationed Balaustion on its highest step, where she told the play and lived it as she told it, repeating it for two days, when they sent the strangers on their way with great wishes and good words. A wealthy Syracusan brought her a gift of a whole talent and bade her keep it for herself, but she left it on the altar of Herakles, an offering of thankfulness. As he had wrestled with Death to save Alkestis, so the second time had he interposed to save his devotees from the grim monster. A band of captives sent her a crown of wild pomegran-

ate blossoms because their master had softened towards them when they called the poet countryman. Hereafter she will live and die, called Balaustion—wild pomegranate flower—the name given her in Rhodes and confirmed in Syracuse, a name most fitting for so tropical a nature, As she recited the tragedy each day, ere she lifted up her voice, she gave a downward look by accident and saw a youth standing at the foot of the temple. He too had a hunger to see Athens and so was found in the ship when herself and comrades started thither. Next month, when the moon rounds full, they are to marry, for which she thanks Euripides. When they landed she sought the house of the tragic poet and laid his sacred hand to her lips in gratitude such as only those can know who have saved life and tasted love through a poet's unpremeditated arbitration or his magnetic uniting power. After relating her adventure she offers to tell the girls the play, asking them to pardon her if in her too ready sympathy for the poet, she project herself into the play, which she often does in short digressions; and these philosophical reflections

on the poem outweigh the poem itself. Rarely does an artist have a more tempting scene presented to invite his interest and entice his brushes than this group of Greek girls lounging at the brookside in their thoroughly girlish way, talking over themes at once so simple and so exalted. In the recitation of the play *Balaustion* digresses in order to bring out a philosophic point in favor of the cowardly husband of *Alkestis*, when "*Charope* makes a face." Would not any girl make a face at an attempt to justify a bad husband?

In her "*Adventure*" *Balaustion* fell in love with *Euthukles* at first sight. Wasn't that a girlish freak, and wasn't it another for her to tell of it? They both loved the same book. There is no such match-maker as the same book, "*Love's purveyor*," as *Dante* calls it. In "*Aristophanes' Apology*" she has become the devoted wife. Here again she is nature itself. Her relation to her husband is ideal. They are not in the world to criticise each other, but to educate and love each other. We can not determine whether her husband's sleeves are out at the elbows, but we can be sure that his brains

are not out at the elbows. Of course she does the talking (that is where Browning poses for her), and her husband—"silent save a love that speaks"—writes down the events of their first year's love and life together, while she recites them in a sort of soliloquy, even forgetting that her husband is present, and including his own conversation, in her reverie.

Attractive as a girl, she has become magnificent as a woman. Even Aristophanes, who did not shrink from abusing the great Euripides, stands abashed before her, while his rollicking companions go slinking off, awed by her presence. He pleads his cause before her, the cause of Comedy and of physical sense while she, as the friend of the dead Euripides, defends the cause of Tragedy and of Art. Scholarly, she is beloved by Euripides, and receives from his hand no less a gift than his manuscript of that "perfect play," the drama of Herakles, with the assurance that her love is the prize it has gained. Whatever theory concerning women Robert Browning has embodied in the character of Balaustion, it is not that of woman's inferiority,

Next to Balaustion it seems appropriate to consider the woman in the poem "Numpholeptos," not from her importance among the women of Browning but from the quality of her mind. Her lover is closely related to those petty men who resent any sign of superior intellect in a woman as an infringement on their rights, and are wont to say of George Eliot or any other highly gifted woman that she has a Man's brain.

Sorely chafed at her indifference to his passion, and jealous of her greater wisdom, he calls her "the unreason of a she-intelligence" and having soothed his wounded pride by this true slave's outbreak, he resigns himself to continued obedience and service. This "unreason" is an instance of the rare type in which Browning delights. Here is a woman, beautiful, self-poised, reasoning, walking her serene way as calmly and independently as a moonbeam, entirely unimpressible save through her intellect, and utterly ignoring the ravings of her lover, whose mind is not of a quality to assimilate with her own. So self-poised is she that many readers of Browning take her

for a nymph, not possessed of human qualities and human passions, or else for an abstract ideal which continually impels man towards greater heights, giving him no rest. The name of the poem seems to call for such an estimate of her, but the lover knew her for a "a very woman" and I shall take his word for it, although he is probably the last person in the world to have correct judgment about it. She is represented as a white, "disempassioned," intellectual light, whose colorless rays, as they diverge, separate into colorific rays, each different one being a pathway of knowledge.

Each of these fairy tracks the lover explores in search of the knowledge which lies in its subtle tint, hoping that the newly acquired wisdom may restore him to the place in her affections which he had enjoyed until she found him lacking in intellectuality. His adventure when he fares forth on the yellow ray is typical of his experiences on each of the others and is such a symphony in yellow as might make Whistler turn buff with envy. Like a bee, which after its search for honey, comes back covered with

pollen dust, so the lover returns as "frightful as absurd," steeped in saffron, sparkling with topaz, smeared with orange, reeking with crocus, sprinkled with sulphur, but alas! entirely free from any suspicion of the ruddy golden yellow, the color in which love revels, for love paints all things golden: "Gold means love." He has obtained all the experiences of each tinge of yellow "that bickers forth to broaden" except the one that is essential.

Coming back to her feet in this comical plight, he finds her still the pure white center, the embodiment and the tomb of all these beautiful prismatic rays of light, which look down upon his too physical being with a cold, silver smile. She has heart enough, but she does not intend to give a brain in exchange for mere unreasoning affection, and so she continually sends him forth on new quests that he may develop his mind. He can explore but one ray at a time. Perhaps when he has explored each one separately he may be able to comprehend the whole when taken together, the pure white ray, "the very woman."

“Who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge.”

In this poem I do not discover that Browning has put any low estimate on woman, or that he considers a moonbeam an unprofitable thing to make love to. On the contrary it would seem that he teaches that the love of such a woman shall prove “a sunset of crimson glory” instead of a pale, cold moonbeam. In the poem “James Lee” we find another intellectual woman, one who is the extreme opposite of the woman of “Numpholeptos,” one whose strong, passionate love finely balances with her reason though at times almost outweighing it. She has lost the love of her husband, and after vain efforts to win it back comes to the stoical conclusion that he has answered the great purpose of broadening her life, for which she can be thankful. In the early part of her experience, affection predominates over her other qualities, and she passes through many reasonings with herself before she can accept the unkindly conditions thrust upon her by a perverse fate. Her soliloquies are revelations of the events of her wedded life, and end as they begin, with

an earnest wish that love were an abiding thing. By the fireside she muses on the lives of the seamen and compares their varying fortunes with her own. Does no other fuel than ship-wreck wood feed our fires? Knows the heart no other drift-wood save oak or pine? Do drenched sailors, from their barks out on the sea, eye the ruddy shaft of fire from her warm house and gnash their teeth with envy? They would spare their curses could they see the dusty trail of the worm which has gnawed its way through the planks of the ship safe in port. Standing in the doorway, she sees the water striped like a snake in its quiet graceful undulations to the leeward; while on the other side it is black, spotted white by the wind, beginning to lash the dark waves into a fury. The ominous appearance of the water suggests to her heart the departing of fortune and the coming of disaster, a suggestion which is strengthened by the voice of the wind with its infinite yearnings.

Her fig-tree leans forth to inhale the soft salt breezes; each of the leaves, like a hand stretched out to the world, for the

treasures summer had sent her, has furled its five fingers; while the vines, each impaled on its stake, writhe in their bondage. In these scenes lies revealed a prophecy of her own evil destiny. Broad in vision and thoughtfully just, she sees the ideal qualities in her husband's nature blended with waste and weeds, and her mind being swayed by the laws of reason, she acknowledges that she did not expect his love to be all harvest and no dearth. She has read fineness into him out of the abundance of her own fine nature until he seems aglow with divinity to her loving eyes, and yet she will not wrong his weakness by calling it worth. "Weeds are not wholly malevolent" but have their place in the universal beauty. Her nature is that of the artist who can see the added grace given by the dead leaf or the broken bough. She is not one of those persons who can worship only the faultless and who do people the great injustice of over-estimating them, placing them on the highest pinnacle of esteem until discovering their imperfections, and then giving way to an unreasonable revulsion of feeling while overthrowing their idols

unceremoniously, and ignoring all the virtues which appeal so strongly at first. Such as the husband was, she took him; he was her whole world; she could praise his flowers and blame his weeds and love both. She is willing to give herself to earth to make low natures better by her throes, and her philanthropy is not of that mechanical sort that approaches people with the air "I have come to do you good." It is a real feeling of love, an expression of the Great Beneficence. It is often deplored as a misfortune incident to the scholar, that he can not assimilate with ignorant people and consequently must live alone in the world. He is looked upon as one of nature's aristocrats, upon whose brow gleams a royal crown, more unapproachable than that of kings and emperors. The wife of James Lee illustrates the opposite side of this usual but questionable theory. Her wisdom has dismissed his pleasure because it is his pleasure to rid himself of her wisdom. It is universally true that the wise man discovers an unending source of information and interest in the foolish, a flower whose virtues are yet undeveloped, a

world whose poetry is yet unwritten, while the foolish finds in the wise only an unending source of weariness. It is not true that the scholar must live alone for want of companionship, because he has not nor can have his equal for an associate. The learned mind has powers of assimilation of which the ignorant never dreamed. The larger always stoops to the smaller, exercising its magnanimity as a gymnast exercises his muscles by the use of dumb-bells; the muscles grow but the dumb-bells fall back to earth as stupid as ever. So the wife of James Lee acknowledges to herself the divine necessity, to her larger mind, of the smaller mind to which she is impelled to look for love, while the next laughing eye that meets her husband's will please him more than all her wisdom. The imagination of this woman is exquisitely poetical. She idealizes the merest cricket of a virtue, singing on the dead turf of his past follies, into a richly-caparisoned war-horse; and her love, falling like the wings of a butterfly and settling unawares on the rock of his insensibility,

“Sunshine outside but ice at the core,
Death’s altar by the lone shore,”

transforms its ugliness into a wonder of beautiful colors.

As she walks under the cliff, she muses on a poem, in which the wind, like a dumb wronged creature that would be righted, intrusts its cause to the poet. Which needs the other’s service? Can his voice loosen the links that bind it to a woe? Or would it rather show its willingness to help him, like the poor hound which whined and licked his hand but would not take his food? Let it forbear its pleadings. Faith requited with falsehood, love made aware of scorn, he can not mend. There is no other tone so fit to falter forth such sorrow, no pathos like its own. In this poem is disclosed to her the pride of the young poet in his power to think out beyond the limits of common minds and see in failure, mistake, disgrace, and even relinquishment, examples to help him on in untried paths; not only helps but touches of the god in babe’s disguise. That we can not draw one beauty into our heart’s core and keep it there changeless, is the

old woe of the world, the tune to whose measures we live and die. Let man then yield to the defeat and rise with it. Let him rejoice that man is hurled unceasingly from change to change,

“His soul’s wings never furled.”

Among the rocks, she learns the same lesson from the good old earth, who bares his bones to bask in the sunshine, and thrusts out his knees and feet for the brooks to ripple over, while he listens to the twitter of the sea-lark. He asks no recompense of the creatures which live and die on his generous bosom; but he smiles in his grand love for those who are insensible to it and unworthy of it.

An artist, she finds consolation at her drawing-board, and sees her life’s lesson in the coarse hand of the little peasant girl who poses as a model for her. She turns from the coarse hand with its rough lines and unpleasant hue to a clay cast of a perfect hand, alive once, dead long ago. Princess-like it seems to her imagination, to wear the ring which the artist placed upon it, in token that here his proud soul had found a mate although his genius

could not comprehend, nor his hand express its beauty. He looked and loved, he learned and drew until the beauty fired his brain and took possession of his soul, and he placed the ring on the finger too perfect for art to portray. Clay could not represent its fineness, only love could do that. From the little girl with the poor, rough hand, from whom she turned to the cold cast of clay, she has learned to understand the worth of flesh and blood. The coarse hand, like the common duties of life, is worth a whole life's devotion and study for its own sake. The common serves to to educe the ideal. If she can not have her ideal life on earth, she will make beauty out of the ugliness of her homely duties. The peasant hand, like the unappreciative husband, whose light love flew away at the first suspicion of a bond, served better perhaps than a fine taper-fingered hand to evolve thought and consequently love. The ideal side of her husband's nature seems symbolized by the cast of the perfect hand; it was the heaven which she had hoped to reach. She tells us that she is harsh and ill-favored; her hair hangs in coarse hanks, she is stunted

in body and stunted in soul, and suggests that James Lee is quite the opposite, and she finds in her lack of graces some excuse for his inconstancy. Doubtless she was plain in person, but stunted in soul she was not. There are persons who realize their inferiority and mourn over it but can go no further. They cannot correct it. It shows some nobility of character to recognize one's own faults and yet greater power to correct and outlive them. The only fault we can find in her character is that she clings to the faithless husband and cannot at once resign herself to the loss of the love which had sought hers. If that is a fault then she had one; but even there she learns resignation. Perhaps absence will accomplish what her presence failed to do, draw to her his thought, and arouse in a measure a love which shall correspond with her own, and his hand shall hold hers from over the sea. She proves herself a philosopher in her resignation to the circumstances and departs to a distant land, "letting the gone thing go."

CHAPTER III.

THE PICTURE OF FAITH.

"'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that failed not by the way."
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

Passing down the corridor we come to Anael, the heroine of "The Return of the Druses," of lesser intellect perhaps but interesting from another standpoint. She is the picture of faith and is the woman yet to come. As Balaustion is typical of all that is most human in woman, Anael stands as the most divine thing in humanity, the faith that is clairvoyant in quality and too far removed from the selfish notions of the world to be considered practical. She illustrates another of Robert Browning's theories, that man has absolute need of woman's faith in him if he is ever to learn the use of free will in moral action. There is no

better proof of the divinity of the Power which places us here than that he absolutely trusts us to use his material without his interference. Faith in Man is the crowning blossom of all philosophy and compasses the most beautiful of all lovely things put on the face of the earth whereby man may grow toward the divine. It comprehends the infinite patience with those slow processes whereby "Good labors to exist," the patience that can wait for the mind to assimilate the good, as mind always will if allowed sufficient time.

"The only fault's with time.
All men become good creatures—but so slow!"

That faith in man which is the product of a long evolution, contrasted with the suspicion which was the predominant trait of the primitive savage and is still a predominant trait of uncultured minds, is one of the most interesting developments in Browning's philosophy. Not that simple faith that is too innocent or too stupid to examine into character, and which trusts implicitly everything that it is told; but that grand faith which is the product

of finer intelligence, which sees and yet believes, which looks with open eyes and believes in spite of faults and errors and sins. Browning oftens turns blind, child-like faith to account and makes it serve great purposes, as in the case of Khalil, Anael's brother. But he does not intend that we shall admire the unquestioning faith of Khalil as we do the heroic faith of Anael, whose clear eyes saw the whole length and breadth of the treachery of her lover, and loved and trusted him notwithstanding. Browning has given us even a stronger illustration of it, in the character of Luria, the very noblest of all his men. It is only such a faith as that of Anael that can ever inspire man to reach toward his highest possibilities. It is only in the exercise of those virtues which such a trust inspires that any hope lies of becoming worthy of such a trust. The most natural thing a man can do when he is trusted is to try to rise to the level of the occasion. If he does not reach the standard he will reach in the direction of it. If he does not reach it the first time he will reach more nearly to it the second. Every time the ideal is put before him he

will reach a little closer to it. I do not mean the faith that pretends to believe but "keeps an eye open" to make sure, as some teachers trust their pupils; but the absolute faith, the faith that God has in man.

It is interesting to give a glance at the other extreme by way of emphasizing the beauty of this faith which we must study if we grasp Browning. The most natural thing a man can do when he is suspected is to lower his standard of action to meet that occasion, as the body when chained in a cold, damp dungeon is injured in health and efficiency. Let a child or man think that you suspect him of being capable of intentional wrong, and he will be very likely soon to justify you in that opinion. There is no denying that it shows weakness to be incapacitated by adverse forces; but it is the latent strength of Nature that development is promoted only through the attractive influence of what is agreeable. In the light of the grand Faith in Man shown in *Anael*, the barbarism of the over-cautious individual, with suspicious "flaw-seeking eyes like needle points" becomes pitiful.

Suspicion and conservatism, the two subtle enemies that sap the life of self-reliance, take their proper place beside the club that the primitive savage used, in the days when ideal relations between man and woman were unknown, when he knocked a woman senseless and carried her to his abode in that helpless condition because he knew of no better method of obtaining a slave. It will be interesting to look at the portrait of our savage ancestor as painted by one of our leading scientific writers. He tells us that this savage was short in stature and apprehensive in expression. He sat before a fire tending a bit of meat which he was cooking, his little eyes rolling from side to side as if keeping watch. He snatched the meat and devoured it, glancing suspiciously around, the muscles of his face giving little rapid twitches. What a leap is there between such a portrait as this and Browning's picture of Anael! Her people, the Druses, having fled from their home in Mount Lebanon, where they worshipped according to their own conscience, to escape the cruelty of Osman, came to a little island garrisoned by the

Knights-Hospitallers of Rhodes. The Druses besought the protection of the Knights, and they appointed a Prefect over them who began his promised paternal government by promptly murdering their chiefs. Here they live, compelled to worship by stealth, assimilating in outward rites with their Christian oppressors, their sons enslaved, their daughters ravished, and themselves held in hopeless servitude. Anael has vowed to love only that man who slays the Prefect, raises up her countrymen, and gives them back their ancient rights. The man who brings it about half deceives himself into the idea that he is Hakeem or a Savior which their sacred records have promised, and indeed he answers the purpose just as well, because he succeeds in saving the tribe, and fulfills all the prophecies of their holy scriptures. In his infancy he was screened from the Prefect's massacre by Anael's mother, who bade him never to forget that he was the son of their last prophet. Inspired with the mission which he had inherited, he had wandered from land to land to raise up allies to save his tribe, and having succeeded, he had come

back only to find his people in still lower depths of degradation, their religion nearly forgotten, and their self-respect almost extinguished. He takes dishonest methods to secure their freedom, devoting his life and giving up his truthfulness for the purpose. By the working of miracles, an art learned among the Christian nations which he had visited, he deceives the people, including Anael, into the delusion that he is the Hakeem, it being in his mind the only method possible to awaken his people to a sense of their shameless lives, and inspire them to follow him back to the land of the cedars. Anael first meets him in the home where her mother has kept her hidden lest her beauty meet the Prefect's eye, so susceptible to the charms of blooming innocence, and she become another victim to his unscrupulous passion and his unrestrained power. Reared in retirement and meeting only the degraded Druses, it is not wonderful that the simple-minded girl should look upon this man, the elegance of foreign courts in his manners, the mighty purpose of a god in his heart, as some supernatural being. Was he not also the son of a

prophet? She has had no one to compare him with, and like a simple country child who sees for the first time some grand city dame and ascribes all beautiful graces to her, though she may be the most ordinary of her class, so Anael mistakes Djabal's cultured ways for expressions of divine attributes. What astonishes her most is that he loves her for her purely human qualities. He demands no goddess. That she is a woman, only that and nothing more, signifies more to him than seraphs' voices or angels' wings.

Comparison is the death of imagination. A young noble, the Duke of Breton's son, is tempted to come among them, by a story which Djabal had told his father to enlist the old Duke's sympathy in favor of the Druses. When she sees the stranger and hears his voice, her faith in Djabal's divinity trembles. The woeful thought flashes through her mind that the effect upon her of Djabal's presence, the nervous shock, the violent throbbing of the heart, the confusion of the brain at his approach, the cessation of energy at his departure, might have been wrought in other frames by the sweet-voiced foreign guest, though

his presence could not quicken nor his absence lessen the beating of her pulse. This least suspicion of a doubt as to Djabal's divine nature seems an intolerable disloyalty, and she stifles it, strengthening her faith with thoughts of his miracles. Did not fire play round his form and music beat her angel wings? Sir Loys leaving the island, her doubts die out. When we are introduced to Anael, her mother is arraying her in the ancient saffron vesture of the tabret-girls—a dagger at the side, as her loyal old heart remembers them on Mount Lebanon. Anael's innocent girlishness betrays a natural delight in her own beauty; she prays that her tresses may be smoothed away from her forehead. Is she not lovelier so? It is the glad day when their scriptures are to be fulfilled, the day when her nation shall return to the Mother Mount, no outcasts as they left her. They can throw off the hateful garb that masks them, and cease their hypocritical concessions to a faith forced upon them. Their leader will be changed to Hakeem and his bride changed with him. She had been proud had she only seen the pageant pass her,

though Djabal had ne'er thrown a glance toward her. But to be chosen his own from them all, to be exalted with him, side by side, leading the exulting Druses worthily to meet the maidens ever waiting beneath the cedars, what could she do to deserve so great an honor in their eyes! She wonders how her lover will look when he is transformed; which feature will be changed. Not his eyes, she hopes—no—they already flash fire as their scriptures prophecy. Not his voice, she hopes—no—a grave current has ever lived grandly beneath its surface; she could not lose the least tone of his voice. Could he but remain human! Could Hakeem only stand by as a radiant robe from which Djabal issuing might still be the man, possessing the robe but not identical with it; so much more does the human crave its own; so little does divinity signify to humanity save as what is best in humanity typifies the divine. She wonders why she can not kneel to Djabal; why he seems so human to her. He seems no god. Her heart pleads to love him as a man, not as a deity. She implores him not to exalt himself. She would have more time

to love him. Overcome by the natural, her old doubt arises, only to be stifled as before, and her conscience urges that it were almost dishonest to become the heavenly bride without confessing her doubt and expiating it. Djabal, who finds his deception of Anael growing intolerable, decides to reveal the truth to her, but her trust confounds him, he can not bear the shame, and so he plans within his heart to disappear from among the Druses when he has seen them safely started for Lebanon. Thus will he live as a god in her memory, keeping her sublime above the world. She will never know of his hypocrisy, will never touch the degradation of the earth, but will live on, the Bride of Hakeem, since Loys, the only one of mankind who is able to betray him, is safely disposed at a distance, ostensibly sent thither to plead redress for the Druses, but actually that he might not unmask Djabal's real character. Djabal is startled into an exclamation of surprise when it is announced to him that Sir Loys has returned. That Hakeem, the omniscient, should be surprised, arouses once more Anael's uneasy doubt. Faith is

all she can offer, all the help she can give her lover, and she will weigh Loys with her Lord that she may chase away the ignoble fear. In Loys' return Djabal sees the possible frustration of his greatest hopes. There is not one least Druse in his tribe but having learned his supernatural claims, will call forth the truth from Loys, who will hold him up to his people's eyes with a knight's unimaginable scorn. To keep Loys separate from the Druses and amuse him until his plans are perfected is his only hope. In this emergency Djabal bids Anael go to Sir Loys and speak with him until he can receive him. Anael's faith rises again. Her Khalif-God has divined her inmost thoughts and offers her this probation to save herself from doubt. She will come closer to the knight whom she has only judged at a distance before, and compare him, the mortal, with her more than mortal lover. Djabal promises soon to follow her and breathes more freely at the respite. One brief hour and all will be over. The Druses embarked, he with Loys will disappear from her forever.

When Anael is come into the presence

of Sir Loys, he makes mad protestations of his love for her, and she bids him leave her; she will not listen; here she waits another. The gallant knight protests that he has expressed no love, the frequent refuge of a cautious wooer. Mad words, doubtless, had escaped his lips, but was he not a knight, sworn to abjure love? Dare he break his knighthood vows? Yet he would know whom she could love, for she has said there was one such. One only, is her reply, the one who raises up her tribe and restores to it its ancient rights and destroys the tyrant Prefect. At this the knight's heart expands with exultant hope and he sees in it an acknowledgment of a love for himself for he has pleaded the cause of the Druses far better than Djabal had expected, so well indeed that he had been appointed Prefect in the old Prefect's stead, and certainly it must be she reads his secret; else what is it feeds her cheeks with the color of June roses? Surely it must be love. He turns to her again and implores some assurance, but she tells him to seek Djabal at noon by the Prefect's chamber, while she paces the room to

wait the coming of her lover. Sir Loys muses on the complexity of his situation. He is the Prefect now, the only one with power to win her love, and yet unable to accept it. Did he come to her as to a slave to set her free and then spend day by day beside her, content with just her freedom and her thanks? Shall he put himself under the spell of Djabal's voice, whose least word is sufficient to induce him to spurn his Christian faith, his family pride, his knightly honor, and become a proverb in men's mouths for breaking compact with those knights who had so graciously bestowed on him the very opportunities he converts into a sword with which to stab them? No, he will fly to the Nuncio and take the vow which binds him irrevocably to his Christian faith. So, pray God, may every lover fly who cherishes a creed that would leave in bondage the woman whom he loves.

Anael's meditations take a different course. She has met the knight and weighed him with her Lord, the human with the divine, and finds them both human. Just one way remains for her to attest her faith in Djabal's divinity. The

god is so absorbed in the man that she, being of the earth, can see the earth only. In her lies the fault. And for such a weak, doubting love as hers, the god who saves her race selects her for his bride. As if her doubts had been open to his all-seeing eye, she turns to him with a new assurance that she is his completely, when he asks if she is Djabal's as if Hakeem had not been. His question, which is intended to invite her caresses, seems to her a subtle thrust directed against her buried doubts. She recalls her feelings towards him before she saw Sir Loys, and tells Djabal that she knew when she saw him first that he was not human. Was not her dim, secluded home by the beating sea a heaven to her, while her people's huts were hell to them? At that time she had resolved never to embrace him till her tribe was saved. Her love, which had cast a halo about him, is a rebuke to him, and he urges as a proof against her convictions that he can not be called divine while the Prefect lives. Until he slays the Prefect her trust in him can have no warrant, he is out of reach of her caresses which shall attest her love for him.

Anael takes this reproach to herself and begs to embrace him as an assurance of her perfect faith in him, but feeling his unworthiness and the wrong of dallying within reach of the endearments he so longs for and must forego, he turns away, telling her that the occasion is at hand which shall prove his divinity and separate them forever. That she has surrendered and proffered him endearments as a man, instead of insisting on the approval of faith in him as a god, seems to her the reason of his turning from her. Knowing how common it is for a man to consider a woman unworthy of him if she stoops to his level to meet him on his own ground and so gives him courage to approach her, how much more—she thinks—must a god hold her unworthy, if she seek to show her faith in him by the least sign of womanly affection. Overpowered by the thought of her unworthiness, she broods over her growing conviction that the only worthy proof she can give of the purity of her devotion is to slay the oppressor. Moved to a state of religious fervor bordering on insanity, she stabs the tyrant Prefect and calls on her lover to change

himself and her into spiritual forms according to his prophecy. Coming to a knowledge of his inability to perform his promises, she turns upon him with a withering scorn in the first impulse of her indignation at his monstrous deceptions; but her resentment dies with the moment and she implores him to go hand in hand with her before the people and confess his crime; she will bear the shame with him, the shame of the man instead of the triumph of the god, and love him more for the new and greater heroism, that moral courage that dares to face ignominy and even death in order to be true to conscience. As he persists in his dishonest course she is about to betray him, but when come into his presence she realizes the sublime motives back of the human methods, and seeing therein the "Power that works for Good" falls dead at his feet crying, Hakeem! for she has seen the god, the divinity that worked to save the world. In this moment of spiritual exaltation the poet would have us feel that she reached an altitude above that taught by any system of theology save the gospel of love. As love awakened

her for the first time to a knowledge of the Messiahship in struggling, sinful humanity, so it awakened Sir Loys to its worth above all creeds and compacts ere he flung himself in despair beside her lifeless body. Even so it inspired Djabal with the sense that his mission had been divine as he grasped the dagger to end his shame and hypocrisy—crying to his people, “On to the Mountain!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE AVENGING SPIRIT.

It is not true that love makes all things easy, but it makes us choose what is difficult.

GEORGE ELIOT.

Were knowledge all thy faculty—then God
Must be ignored; love gains him by first leap.

FERISHTAH'S FANCIES.

IN direct contrast to Anael we find the woman of "The Inn Album." She is the daughter of a country parson and for eighteen years has been growing up in seclusion, in lily-like purity. She is motherless, brotherless, and sisterless, grand as a Greek statue.

"She had just a statue's sleepy grace
Which broods o'er its own beauty."

It is an artistic necessity that she has lived aloof from all contaminating influences that might try her innocence and develop it into virtue.

She meets with a man who has never found any motive in life other than the gratification of his own whims and desires. He is youngish old and oldish young, well born, refinement every inch from brow to boot end. All his life he has been a woman-liker and it is his ignoble boast that he has more than twice as many victims on his list as the good folks say.

The innocent maiden loves him, and he admires her so much that he brings about a mock marriage. He reasons with himself that he has found so rare a jewel that the whole world must needs grow all one eye to see it, and having seen, to covet; he must secure the prize at once, at any price, in any manner, only so that no rival shall snatch it from him. He is not at all sure whether he means to right the matter in case she require it. His purse has been made light through his recent excesses, so that he can not cage the bird which he has caught, and this leads to an explanation in which she discovers that his truths are only lies.

“Being true, devoted, constant—she
Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain
And easy commonplace of character.”

Her soul outbreaks in a great indignation that brings him to his senses. He stammers that he has been in jest, but is now in earnest. He implores her to forget all else but that his heart has loved, and does love, and shall love her ever, and prays for the privilege of making reparation by a real marriage. Her love suddenly changes into a great hatred, and she leaves him, refusing to hear any excuses, sending back his letters unopened. With her, sin against love is the one unpardonable sin, for which there is never forgiveness, neither in this world nor the world to come, an insult to the Holy Spirit that teaches us that God is love. She feels that she is enveloped in a cloud of dishonor, and her first impulse is to end her own life; but her despair breaks when she thinks that, with all her weakness, she has yet the power to hurl contempt at the leper who would have contaminated her, soul and body. Before she learns that she is deceived, she meets with a manly youth, a mere boy, one who is innocence itself. He loves her and offers her his hand, but she does not find in him that which claims return of love,

and she tells him that she belongs to another. Many Browning students make it a point in her favor that, on finding herself betrayed, she did not seek out the young man and avail herself of his love and fortune, while involving him in her own entanglement.

Like a hunted animal she searches for refuge in obscurity. She seeks out a poverty stricken, inanely good, old clergyman whom she had been used to pity for his ignorance and stupidity. She has heard it is his will to take a wife, a helpmate rather. The coarsest sample of womanhood, according to her own statement, would have served him equally well with God's own angel. She neither loves him nor believes in his work,

“Heaven he let pass, * * *
But Hell he made explicit,”

but she pleads with him that she is just the person whom he needs, and induces him to take her for his wife, giving as an explanation of her reasons for such a step that she considers it her duty.

His only scruple is that she may lack physical strength to give him all the aid

he needs. She sets herself to help him, and considers it a higher mission to be his drudge, his nurse, his wife, to help him re-write and re-preach the old dogmas that she neither respects nor believes, than to be the wife of the man who deceived her and is convinced that through her love he might develop into perfect manhood, and who for want of that love, as he says, and pursued by the Nemesis of her unforgiving spirit, declines into that degradation which it is the peculiar office of the spirit of unforgiveness to create. Has Browning painted here a picture of Revenge, a portrait of Hatred in all its ugliness, or the stern features of Retributive Justice in their awful grimness?

Her relation to her first husband was one of innocence, and his to her, dishonest and guilty; did his relation to her become blameless when he tried to make reparation? Her relation to her second husband was unwholesome if not guilty, and thereby is shown that she has lost the primal clearness of her moral perception. Hatred, although a cleaner passion than lust, bears just as surely within itself the seed of self-destruction.

Unforgivingness beyond a certain limit is a base crime, and one in which no manly man or womanly woman can possibly indulge. The limit beyond which implacability can not go without being a crime, is restitution and reparation. When the guilty one has made restitution and reparation, unforgivingness can no longer be classed under the head of decency or sanity. In his feeling that he had the least right to retreat, in his uncertainty as to whether he intended to use reverently or cast away her affections, her "Holy of Holies," lies the leprosy of his sin and that which makes it irreparable.

After four years' separation from her betrayer she meets him accidentally at a country inn, and he prostrates himself at her feet imploring her forgiveness. He regards her relation to the parish priest whom she has married as a worse mock-marriage than their own had been.

What was love for if not to bear the test of eliminating the taint in the beloved one? Should love seek only its own advantage? Was she not wronging three instead of one and making a useless ex-

penditure of life? Must he at last doubt the integrity of her, the precious, whom he had supposed the wronged one, whom he had held immeasurably superior to himself? Then he had never outraged her love, since she never owned a love to outrage. Love may use hate's weapons, but turn to hate, never! nor to indifference even. He begs her to judge no man by the solitary work of the devil in him.

She meets his pleadings with supreme scorn, he is the Arch-cheat and the Adversary whose tears and prayers and curses alike move her contempt.

While the man kneels at her feet the boy whose hand and heart she had refused breaks in upon them. One year since, the youth had met this man, a stranger, had sought his friendship, learned to love him and had this very morning confided to him the whole story of his disappointment which the elder man had previously guessed in a measure. Melancholy had placed her depressing hand upon his spirits, and he had been minded to sit down for life in voluntary exile to brood over his heartache, when

this man's influence roused him from his three years' despair.

The man persuaded him to travel and initiated him into all kinds of dissipation, teaching him to gamble in the hope of eventually winning his fortune from him. When the youth has become tired of dissipation, the man persuades him that he had better marry a wealthy cousin and settle down.

The youth had learned the man's secret, that some woman had tripped him in the path of life, surmising it at first and coaxing it from him afterward, but neither man nor boy had divulged the name of the woman who had proved a stumbling block to both. Now as the boy confronts them and learns that the wronged woman was the lady of his heart, varying emotions successively overpower him; jealousy at finding them together, until he is assured that the meeting is that of two foes and an unpremeditated one; contempt for the man who had wronged *his* love, no matter how many other victims he may have had.

When he had heard the transgressor's story from his own lips, his heart had

swelled with pity, but now that the matter comes home to his own soul, revenge can suggest no punishment too great for the wrong-doer.

Unwilling to lose his hold on the young man, the senior entreats the woman to withdraw, that he may speak with him privately, which she refuses to do, fearing to leave the youth in his coils. Since prayer avails not, the man will try what command will do. He bids her not only retire from his presence but return when he shall desire it.

“‘Come!’ breaks in
The boy with his good glowing face. ‘Shut up!
None of this sort of thing while I stand here!
* * * * No bullying, I beg!
Bully a woman you have ruined, eh?’”

The youth proceeds to taunt him with the stories he has heard concerning him, telling him that he gives credit to them all at once though he has always disbelieved before.

He no longer doubts his cheating at cards, or that he was kicked like a ball because he shirked from accepting a challenge from the fellow with a sister, or that he had a bet against the horse that was

doctored at the Derby. The youth turns to the lady and prays her not to think herself or him in danger. His hand is fortified with a horsewhip that can teach curs to decamp. The scoundrel owes him ten thousand pounds, won the night before at the gaming-table. If the cash be not forthcoming he will post him at the club, and pillory the defaulter, though previously in a friendly mood he had declined the money. The demon side of the offender's nature is at length aroused to retaliation. Post his name? that would indeed be a bruise from the whipcord.

Revenge like a contagious disease infects the last drop of healthy blood in his veins. He will hunt out some old scorpion scourge to match their weapons. He determines that he will play the winning game yet, and place her as she has placed him, beyond the pale of self-respect. He will compel her to surrender herself to the youth in payment of the debt; and if she dare refuse he will expose her to her husband. He writes this cowardly command in the Album and hands it to her, again asking her to leave the room.

When the two men are alone, the elder

advises the youth that their fair friend is not so virtuous as she seems, that she had thrown herself into his arms in former years, and that the youth has only to demand in order to possess her. While absent from them she reads the dastardly inscription in the Album and takes the poison which she has carried with her during all these years that she may be ever prepared to resist his toils. The woman returning to them with the stamp of death upon her brow, the elder man retires, and the youth not only discloses the senior's treason, which he likens to an insane man's gibberish, but also offers to revenge, to rescue, and redeem her.

He had been taught so much of the man's beast-nature that he had meant to marry his cousin, taking her heart when he had no heart to give in return, an offence for which he will make haste to seek pardon, that he may stand free to serve the woman whom he loves.

If she is bound in marriage he will sit a life long at her gate, a mere well-wisher. She need not look at him, much less fling him a "thank you, are you there, old friend?"

After no end of weeks, months and years she might smile, "I believe you did your best," and that smile would make his heart leap, such a leap as would land his feet in heaven, to await her there. Here is his hand with his name to take or leave, though his probation be a life-time.

Hand in hand the couple face the transgressor as he enters. "So, you accept him?" he queries. "Till us death do part," she replies. He offers them mock congratulations of the most insulting character, when she opens the album and reads slowly word by word aloud his fiendish warrant. When the youth hears this infamous proposal he springs like a tiger upon the cunning serpent, stamping out his slimy strength.

She recognizes that this last act was good but useless, since she is dying, and thanking her friend who tears the black page from the album, she writes the lines which shall vindicate her boy-lover and leave a lasting stigma on the dead man's name.

Having reached life's consummation, crowned by a love which is to prove eternal, her death is a victory as her life

has been a defeat. Into the character of the transgressor has Browning painted the picture of a soul strangled at its birth, a picture of the tiny Love-god contending against the gigantic and remorseless figure of death? Or has our poet condemned the man out of his own lips in that his love turned to hatred? Has he portrayed Satan incarnate? In the woman's portrait has he depicted the destructiveness of that narrow faith which does not recognize in man the right as well as the possibility of building something beautiful from the debris of his follies; the self complacency whose chief office is to condemn in others what one excuses in himself, and whose end is death; the goodness that is good for nothing except to save itself? Rather has he not painted the majesty of womanliness; her power to rise supreme above the fiend that seeks to outrage love and hurl the hideous monster of evil howling to hell's lowest depths?

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHREWD WOMAN.

We should never inspect the conduct of men, unless we at the same time take an interest in improving it.

GOETHE.

The soul is hopeless only in regard to those things it is ignorant of or mean toward.

JENKIN LLOYD JONES.

EULALIA, the heroine of "A Soul's Tragedy," does not deserve to be classed with the woman of the "The Inn Album" in tragic grandeur, but like her she possesses the power of psychical vivisection unaccompanied by the spirit of healing, and is the very opposite to Anael. Eulalia is the betrothed of Luitolfo, the good man of the play, and the beloved idol of Chiappino, the bad man. She is discreet enough to love the man on whom fortune smiles, the friend-finding man, the one who is good because he is not bad. She

is faithful to her lover and not unkind to Chiappino, who is bad to begin with because he aspires to do something a great deal better than any one else dared to think of, and bad to end with because he became worse entangled in prosperity than he ever could have been in misfortune, and fell from his ideal through tampering with his own conscience. Eulalia is constantly in the society of both men, but does not know that Chiappino loves her, although keenly alive to all other psychological conditions of his soul. Chiappino is a modern Don Quixote. His mission is to right wrongs, defend the defenseless (against everybody but himself), overthrow tyranny and elevate mankind. Perhaps Eulalia instinctively feels that Chiappino's love is an uncertain, intangible thing, and consequently it appeals to her as being only a superior egotism. Her relation to Luitolfo is almost beautiful, and would be entirely so if she did not rather compromise herself by taking the very great liberty of engaging herself to Chiappino for a short time in order to make a study of him and convince him that her love, for which he professes to

hunger, can not aid in the development of so selfish a soul. This parenthesis in her loyalty to Luitolfo is certainly novel, and lovers in general would hardly tolerate such a peculiar quality of shrewdness.

At the outset we find Eulalia in Luitolfo's house with Chiappino, waiting the return of her lover from the Provost's palace, whither he has gone to intercede for his friend, upon whom the sentence of exile has been passed. She turns to Chiappino and speaks apprehensively of her lover's delay, and says that she should begin to tremble for his safety if it were not for the Provost's acknowledged friendship for Luitolfo. As Chiappino makes no response, she asks him why he is so silent, when he bitterly suggests in a laughing way that her trepidation is a fine affectation. Being deeply in love with her himself, he is strongly impressed with the feeling that she must reciprocate his passion, and hence he regards her agitation as a mask to cover her true feelings. Not aware of his love for her, she exclaims in astonishment at his light manner of treating Luitolfo's tardiness, when he makes the sarcastic rejoinder that silence

was the only thing in the whole world he had supposed wholly his own, even to a single man's or woman's love, and she had taken even that from him. In her kindness of heart she desires Chiappino to say that his wrongs have cast a cloud over his spirit, not that he is beloved of no man or woman. Chiappino grasps at this as a possible justification of his hope and says "My God, were't not for thee!"—but is interrupted by Eulalia, who innocently misconstrues his use of the word "thee," and replies,

"Ay, God remains,
Even did man forsake you."

Chiappino corrects her with the bitter insinuation that if it were not for God, no hope would remain with man for speaking the truth or hearing the truth. In her innocence she continually makes it difficult for him to confess his love, and he sees therein only an evasion of the truth; that having compromised her integrity by engaging herself to one man while she loves another, she must maintain the dissimulation, and so will neither speak the truth herself nor hear him speak it. He,

too, during their acquaintance, had been speaking lies through sheer incompetence to rid himself of the old miserable trick of telling falsehoods, those lies which society demands under the head of politeness or reserve. It is Heaven's prompting that he shall speak the truth to her, which he dare not be ashamed of. He directs a prayer to God to reclaim his features, which had refused to express his soul and to give him power to speak out boldly, even if he himself were the only one present to approve the spoken truth. After a moment's hesitation he surmises that he may have been too hasty, and exclaims, "Who knows but you too might approve?" Whether or not she has begun to suspect the direction of his thoughts, he has, in a general way, included herself and her lover among those whose motives he has attacked, which is a sufficient reason for her response that she will not bind herself with any promise to support him in his conclusions before she knows them, and if he depends upon her to do so it were better for him to keep silence. Since she had soothed him in the beginning with the faintest touch of affec-

tionate sympathy, he goes back to that point as a warrant for further declarations. She would know his grievances then and she shall know them now, why his gratitude to herself and her friends for their "services" was not gratitude, and why their services were not services. Himself and Luitolfo were both born at one time in much the same circumstances of rank and wealth; and both, up to this evening, had fared side by side, Luitolfo in the sunshine, he in the shadow. He quite approves of the world's opinion that Luitolfo, basking in fortune's smiles, had always been prudently passive, remedying in silence the result of fruitless action, while the foolish look on only to ridicule; a man who smoothed easily exasperated natures, but never sought out opportunities for defending the weak against the strong; a man who could not forego the pleasure of binding up his enemy's wounds after a battle, even if he were obliged to wear his foe's colors and embrace his creed in order to obtain so great a privilege. As Eulalia listens a great astonishment grows upon her, and she rebukes Chiappino; but he is too blind to understand that he is

reasoning from false premises, and still presuming on her love, resumes complainingly that he would have supposed her readier to sympathize with the world's opinion of himself, which he suggests is a very good one, although Eulalia is too much absorbed with his grievances to take him at his meaning. He was always ready to combat men in their sins. He would speak to them if he could possibly find a convenient occasion. If the avenue of speech were not open, he would make them aware of their sins by the scornful expression in his face, "the expression of him who sees the horrible." If he could not get the opportunity of glaring at them he would pray for them, and for these blunt virtues the world commended him. Eulalia's innocent question following Chiappino's good account of himself, although intended to soothe him, only nettles him into a worse mood. Must it then follow, she asks, that Luitolfo and herself had outraged his feelings, because the world had condemned him for his rashness? The great motive of Chiappino's life had been to liberate his townsmen from a tyrannical government, while

Luitolfo's sole concern was to be an inoffensive citizen, neutral alike to Provost and revolvers. Chiappino, again foiled in the main purpose of his conversation, replies impatiently that all mankind is outraged in the successes of the ruling party and his overthrow, and for that reason Luitolfo's neutrality is an outrage to him; it is aggressive goodness that the people need. She tries once more to soothe him, assuring him that her lover and herself must share a common censure with him there, so he can not point out any offense in them, which causes Chiappino to revert to the question of his gratitude, from which he had digressed through her interruptions. Should he be grateful to Luitolfo for paying his last three fines incurred in attempting to liberate the people, Luitolfo with the rest, when according to her own acknowledgment her lover wished him to set them free? Have not soldiers a right to demand a support from those for whom they fight? and do patriots expect gratitude from the heroes who have defended their cause? Eulalia shames him for justifying himself in his ingratitude, when he proceeds to show her that

Luitolfo's motive in paying the fines was not even patriotism, much less friendship, since it was only a check to hold him back from revealing his love to her, the lady whom Luitolfo hoped to win for himself. Eulalia bids him cease, but he persists in his aggressions, accusing her of having known of his love all the time. She must have seen it in his eyes that grew dim when she gave him her mask to hold; she must have heard it in his stammering speech. She responds that she hears it now for the first time. Chiappino is so completely blinded by his certainty that instinct could not mislead him that he bids her put a truce, for this once, to toying with the affections of a banished fool, and confess that she knew of his love for her. She denies that she had ever had any such knowledge, and assures him that she had only looked upon him as the friend of her now-affianced lover, that he had had just as free access to her as Luitolfo, and might have spoken as well as he. Every one knew what a ready wit he had when addressing a crowd. Luitolfo had always been first to place him where he might have all preferences, and

yet he was silent. Why should he blame her now? Surely she must be fascinated to talk thus with him when she is all but wedded to a man she loves, yet it must be that he is wronged and that Luitolfo feels the wrong and pities it. Eulalia would have displayed more of what the world is pleased to style common sense at this point if she had dismissed Chiappino without ceremony, but she shows a more gentle womanliness in that she chose to compromise her dignity rather than leave him in hopeless embarrassment.

A noble nature will suffer almost any indignity rather than leave another at a disadvantage.

Love always has some value, whether it peers up through the slime of the gutter or bursts from the throat of the feathered warbler, whether it dim the eye of a Chiappino or brighten the face of a Balaustion.

Love is always the expression of divinity, and is too precious to receive no requital. Every human being owes something of affection to every other human being. Love for one is a narrow and niggardly passion, deprived of real dignity,

when it comprehends only its own close self-related interests. In listening to Chiappino, Eulalia showed a whole-souled magnanimity, a philosophic self-poise, for her heart must have been great with indignation at hearing such charges brought against her lover.

Chiappino justifies himself in not having been as assiduous in his efforts to gain her affections as was Luitolfo, with the excuse that he dared not go to the heaven of her love without a reverent pause, a growing less unfit for heaven. He dared not speak. Was it not enough for him that he must contend with his foolish timidity, but must he also suffer himself to be loaded with Luitolfo's benefits and thereby be compelled to give him all the advantage? Eulalia entreats him to do justice to Luitolfo, who is at the Provost's supplicating at his own risk justice for his supposed friend, but Chiappino continues. The true course, he says, would have been for Luitolfo to call his favors by the proper name, so that he might have thrown them back and remained unhampered to win her love. But having received Luitolfo's benefits, which were all but forced

upon him, he had been constrained through gratitude to his benefactor to keep silence. This gratitude had been but a dream from which they would better awake.

Eulalia trembles with agitation caused no doubt by the unpleasant combination of circumstances. The night was hastening on, Luitolfo had not returned from his dangerous mission, and the man whom he was seeking to save from exile was forcing upon her unwilling ears unwelcome protestations. Chiappino mistakes her trembling for an expression of nervous dread at becoming the wife of Luitolfo, while she loves himself. He gloats over it and sees in it his revenge; he tells her that she is forced to become Luitolfo's bride through no longing of the heart but rather through the poor bond of habit; that Luitolfo had paid his fines, furnished him clothing from his own wardrobe, had given him food from his table, had held him up when fortune fell away, just as men would take pains to preserve the stump of an old tree, whose boughs had sheltered them in childhood, because it would not have looked well to drop the

old friend. This morning Chiappino having spoken out his mind to the Provost and having received the sentence that he must leave the city before night on pain of death, Luitolfo must needs go to the Provost to make gallant intercession, just because it is a graceful way of behaving. Soon he will come back with brave accounts of his intercession and its failure and hurry him off while the citizens will sleep upon their woes and say that their champion might better not have waked them up to a sense of their slavish condition if he had not the talent to relieve them. He longs to take the Lugo path which shall lead him out of the city, but first would have assurance that she has loved him. Eulalia's prompt denial is tinged with pity and disgust, but it is beyond Chiappino's power to believe that his love has had no return. He still reasons on the presumption that she has been aware of his love, but she tells him that if she can cure him of his blindness she shall not repent having listened to him. She assures Chiappino that if he had been placed in like circumstances with Luitolfo and herself, he would have adjusted his

life in the same manner to his surroundings. This he indignantly refutes, ending with a curse on any one who loves house, land or life above liberty. A furious knocking at the door startles Eulalia but calls forth a scoff from Chiappino. The would-be hero has returned, will parade the dangers he has braved, give the exile a purse, and speed him on his way with all possible haste. Before he finishes his sarcastic ejaculations Luitolfo rushes in with garments torn and bloody. Having struck the Provost when that officer refused to hear his intercession in behalf of Chiappino, he supposes that he has killed him and is frenzied with the thought. Luitolfo hardly knows what he is doing. He gives his blood-stained cloak to Eulalia, but thinking how much braver Chiappino is, withdraws it from her daintier hands and begs Chiappino to take both the garment and the responsibility of the bloody deed from him. Eulalia has no thought save for Luitolfo's wounds, while Chiappino taunts him with the justice which has overtaken him. It all came of Luitolfo's conservatism. This was the fruit of his conciliatory speeches. Chi-

appino will now show him his way. He will go to the palace and do justice once for all. Luitolfo is too bewildered to comprehend what Chaippino means to do, but when he becomes aware that his friend's intention is to kill the Provost, he confesses to the murder, and implores Chiappino to fly and save Eulalia from the crowd in pursuit of him. Chiappino is touched by this revelation of affection, and begs Luitolfo to embrace him. Luitolfo prays him once more to fly and take Eulalia and save themselves from the beheading axe, the thumb-screws and the gadge. Eulalia tells Chiappino to go; he can work no good to them; perhaps he can save himself, but he need no longer believe that all the world must be cursed. She bids him farewell. There are already torches in the place and citizens in pursuit. She will stay with Luitolfo.

Chiappino rises for the moment to the height of the occasion, as he was capable of doing when great occasions presented themselves. He wraps the cloak which was to have masked himself about Luitolfo, who is too bewildered to recognize the benevolence of the act, gives him the

passes himself, an exile, had expected to use, tells him to take the Lugo gate and pushes him off into the friendly darkness. Luitolfo is left to save himself as best he may while Chiappino turns to face the danger, the death if need be. It hardly seems as if any sudden emergency could so overpower a man's senses that he could leave his betrothed to confront death while he seeks his own safety. What does our poet mean by allowing Luitolfo's senses to become so confused while Eulalia's remain so clear? It can not be that he is true to the old tradition that "Woman's power to make a man what she needs him to be, lies chiefly in her dependence." Eulalia might have fled with Luitolfo. The passes were sufficient for both and the darkness would have screened them. A woman less self-balanced would have followed her lover, fearing lest in his distraction he might come to harm. She chooses to remain and grapple with the greater danger. It is well-known throughout the city that she is the betrothed of Luitolfo. The poet leaves it open for us to infer that she will serve as a decoy to mislead his pur-

suers into the idea that he had not fled; also that her true instinct could suggest no other way than to die for the man she loved. She blames Chiappino that he did not flee from the on-coming mob. He will be taken for an accomplice, she fears, and on him will fall men's vengeance. All know him for a hater of the Provost. Chiappino is not satisfied to be called an accomplice. He fain would have done the deed himself. It was the end toward which he had always worked; he puts on Luitolfo's vest that he may claim the act and die for his friend. Eulalia approves him and as the shouts of the pursuing mob increase, Chiappino's spirits rise into a reckless exultation that his life's great hope has in a measure been fulfilled. He would speak or sing, but Eulalia's reverent nature is awed by the thought of the coming change and she gently reproves him; she would rather that their last moments be spent in prayer. She thinks it easier to die nobly than to live nobly. Unconscious of her own goodness, as really good people usually are, she doubts her ability to live as her poor cousin Cesca, who suffers greater torture than

death every day from the sternness of her husband; or as Tisbe, whose heart goes forth every evening after a wild, thoughtless son.

The shouting mob comes on and Chiappino steps out boldly and confronts them with "I killed the Provost!" when lo! instead of the Provost's party, a friendly populace greets him with the cry.

"Chiappino, friends!
Our Savior! The best man at the last as first."

They applaud him for his patriotic enthusiasm, expressing the greatest satisfaction at the Provost's death and tell him to choose his own reward. Eulalia looks reprovingly at him and rebukes him for not seizing on the first opportunity to disclaim the deed in Luitolfo's favor. Chiappino understands her reproof, but excuses himself on the ground that the danger is not yet over. He implies that the people, who are very fickle, might not have received the Provost's death so kindly if they had known it to be Luitolfo's deed. Luitolfo being the Provost's friend, it would look like a murder, done in a sudden passion, and not a deed of

patriotism. When the people grow calm, it will be a better time to disclaim the deed. Eulalia warns him that it will be a great regret to him if he does not confess the truth at once.

A month passes, during which Luitolfo lies in hiding on one of his estates to await results; while Chiappino, having eased his conscience with the thought that his intention was to kill the Provost, and therefore, that he has a right to claim the deed which Luitolfo accidentally but unwillingly performed, leads the revolt and puts himself in power. It is during this time that Eulalia, having become disgusted with his pretension, tries the very unique but exceedingly dangerous experiment of professing to return Chiappino's love in order to vindicate Luitolfo's nature and justify her choice. She keeps Luitolfo informed of what is passing, except that she does not explain in detail what experiment she is making, and urges him to keep in retreat because Chiappino is in danger. Luitolfo sees no other way than to come to the rescue of his friend, and so disregards her injunctions just as she expected he would. The

poet does not explain why Luitolfo was so much more concerned for his friend than for his betrothed, but probably he has a better understanding of men than people in general. When Luitolfo meets them, Eulalia is bidding Chiappino a last farewell. He is about to become Provost and continue the old system of government, himself being the absolute ruler. Chiappino is explaining to Eulalia his reasons for having changed his political principles and also why her love has proved insufficient. His affections have become "well-trained." His soul's capacity for love has widened. Having been instructed, he can not find in one person all the component parts of love, as a savage finds sword, scepter and idol, all in one club-stick. Eulalia reminds him of what a dreadful loss she shall sustain in losing his love, and asks him what he has to say about Luitolfo, the author of his present prosperity. Chiappino makes plausible and ingenious excuses, but Eulalia reminds him that people should perform what they profess. The Pontifical Legate, who had come to settle the political disturbances of the city, enters in

time to hear a part of her remark and politely asks to have it repeated to him, which Chiappino does, turning it off with a sneer at its triteness. The Legate gives him some friendly but pungent advice. He understands that Chiappino does not choose to marry his old friend's love, to which Chiappino replies that he must have a woman that can sympathize with him and appreciate him. As Chiappino is about to accept the once abhorred office of Provost, Luitolfo throws off his disguise and steps forward to relieve him of his unearned responsibility. Eulalia, satisfied with the result of her experiment, rejoins her lover, from whom, henceforth she shall never be divided whatever be his fortune, while Chiappino takes the Lugo path.

As a part of the mechanical structure of the play, Eulalia is a success. Her great one-use in the play is to heighten the effect of Chiappino's error, as if his cup of shame were not already full to overflowing without the added humiliation of her facetious scorn; she has answered the mathematical purpose of proving Chiappino dishonest and egotistic, and Lui-

tolfo honest and unselfish. But as an artistic creation Eulalia is a failure, for she is not a revelation of nature, in that her love was not a natural passion and consequently could produce no natural result. If she had really loved Chiappino the issue might have been quite different. The office of love is to develop, not to criticise, and if Chiappino's soul failed of the development which was expected to be the outcome of her love, it was because her pretended passion did not answer the purpose of real love. Chiappino found her love worthless, just as any one would find a love worthless that was conjured up to serve an occasion; put on just for the sake of working out a problem "like the constant in calculus, that can be left out at any time." Eulalia is not an artistic success from another point of view, namely, that the latter part of her record entirely contradicted the former. A woman who is too noble to leave a person at a disadvantage at one time, will not seek to expose him to ridicule at another, without extending to him at the same time the hope of recovering himself. A woman who is brave enough to face

death for her lover, is not going to trouble herself about other people's opinions concerning him nor descend to any trickery to justify her choice.

"Love asks no evidence
To prove itself well placed."

A woman who is so sensitive as to shake with nervousness at the mention of her lover's name is not going to become a consummate actress all in a moment and play a double part, deceiving a man whom she has one day convinced that she does not love into the contrary opinion on the following day. It is not unusual for an artist, in the absence of his model, to pose a wooden figure in order to continue his work. While Eulalia is a natural and beautiful woman during the first part of the drama, she is a wooden manikin, draped in a philosophy, in the second part. The change from the woman to the wooden figure is too perceptible. As a woman, Eulalia sees the highest possibility in Chiappino. As a wooden figure, she forgets it. As a piece of dramatic machinery she puts herself on a level with him, descending to knavery in order

to work out an ethical problem, while he descends to knavery to work out a political problem. The scheme of raising up humanity forms no part of her character. Her love is a dissecting knife. At her best she is no builder-up of character. She can criticise but not analyze. She can probe but not heal. She can examine but not correct. Like a drop of acid, she serves as a test both to demonstrate that Luitolfo is pure gold, a small thing of perfection, a jewel which she shall never be ashamed to wear on her finger, while Chiappino is composed of pure brass, or perhaps of still baser metal, unmindful that unexpected events surprised his soul into its tragedy as a mighty joy, too great to bear, shattered the Liberty-Bell when it pealed forth its cry of "Independence!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNFORTUNATES.

The catholic man hath mightily won
God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain,
And sight out of blindness, and purity out of a stain.
SIDNEY LANIER (*The Marshes of Glynn.*)

God has his archangels and consorts with them—tho' he made, too, and intimately sees what is good in, the worm.

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY.

IN his treatment of fallen men and fallen women, Browning has shown all the strength of Goethe's realism unaccompanied by his offensively rough handling, and a far more delicate imagination. Our poet has never introduced the topic except for the sake of evolving therefrom some important lesson. He grasps the subject with unflinching courage, not as some "gingerly treader on tip-toes" who is afraid of compromising his reputation. He never minces matters and he makes

no apologies. The great artist never apologizes; he has true instincts; his work will be right and he will not care what any one thinks of it. It is a disputed question and one that will ever remain unsettled whether

“There’s naught above
The all-embracing atmosphere of Art.”

The nude in poetry, like the nude in painting, will always be obnoxious to many. What is chaste and beautiful in white marble becomes coarse when put into colors and still coarser when spoken in words. I doubt if painting flesh for the mere sake of revealing flesh tints is ever high art. I doubt if any one is ever entirely comfortable in the presence of nude painting, unless the picture teaches some noble lesson and the nudity is a necessity in the teaching of that lesson. So the nude in poetry is never excusable except when it comes in as a necessary part in showing human love contending against wrong.

It has become a proverb that “the artist shows his character in the choice of his subject,” and this we are willing to

admit, only let people be sure what the subject is. Browning's real subject is too often mistaken by hasty readers, too often confounded with the accidents of the subject. Browning is a painter of possibilities. The possibility of good is more apparant to him than the probability of evil.

"Art's fittest triumph is to show that good
Lurks in the heart of evil evermore,
That love, though scorned, and outcast, and withstood,
Can without end forgive, and yet have store:
God's love and man's are of the self-same blood,
And he can see that always at the door
Of foulest hearts the angel-nature yet
Knocks to return and cancel all its debt."

If Browning does not paint saints and angels, he does paint the possible saint or angel in the Magdalen, which is more to earth's purpose. However great his mission to scholars and poets, to the saints and great ones of the earth, his greatest mission is to the fallen. He pleads their cause as no other poet has done, treating what seems to lesser artists a fatal error, as only one of many points in the long perspective of the soul's eternal development. He has treated his men and women in much the same manner, not

exonerating in one what he condemns in the other. He has ostracized his fallen man of the "Inn Album" from society and self-regard in precisely the same way that society ostracizes fallen women. And yet he has invested this same man with a hunger for the love of one who is pure, with a blind striking out in one direction for self-respect that is pathetic. His cry of despair when he implores the woman not to judge him solely by the work of the devil in him still rings in our ears after we have left him among the lost, and we feel that Browning has put some of his best philosophy into his lips. In many poems our poet teaches that it is better to struggle eternally in the direction of self-respect, without the least success in grasping it, than to sail serenely on the stagnant sea of self-righteousness. Even sensuality is not so hopeless as that perfect goodness, ripe to rottenness, that can only hold its skirts aside in breathless anxiety lest they suffer contamination from the grimy workers in the world who bedaub themselves some times by the filth on the ladder by which they rise. And yet Browning never excuses or

palliates sin. Those readers who find intentional up-holding of wrong-doing in his poems have not read deeply. He treats it, as he treats poetic imagination in "The Ring and the Book," as the gold's alloy necessary in making the mass manageable, and only by mingling it with the gold and duly tempering both, can the artificer work the metal to its required shape, when the proper acid shall remove the alloy but leave the shape intact. Ignorance and evil are the necessary limitations which keep the soul at work to gain strength to meet the greater requirements of another life. Our poet makes error one of the accidents of eternity, and animalism only a coarse capacity for or desire of gaining knowledge, such as earth was meant to bestow.

"What is he but a brute
Whose soul hath flesh to suit,
Who spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man propose this test—
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?"

* * * "It was better youth
Should strive through acts uncouth
Toward making, than repose on aught found made."

"Evil, the scheme by which, through ignorance,
Good labors to exist."

Although Browning has touched his portraits of fallen men with a clean and reverent hand, he has hardly compassed the motive of George Eliot, who has given us dignified illustrations of what those unfortunate men might do for themselves and for others if they were not self-justified in their offences and if they really cared to regain a right to self-respect. Nor in his portrayal of their usually less-favored sisters, has he traced the development through sin which our own inimitable Hawthorne has displayed in that marvelous creation Hester Prynne of "The Scarlet-Letter." The nearest approach that Browning has made to Hawthorne's Hester Prynne is in the portrait of Clara of the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country." Hester Prynne lives grandly and supports her child through poverty, public disfavor and every sort of trouble, true to the man who was too cowardly to be true to her, while Clara, although not shut away from the scorn of the world, is yet surrounded with such comforts as wealth and love can bestow. There is a general feeling among the students of this poem that Browning has done Clara an injustice in making

her motives so mercenary, a feeling that twenty years of fidelity and devotion was a sufficient proof that she was true to Léonce Miranda for his own sake. They appreciate and approve her development "from grub to butterfly," even if she must fumble over a whole plant in order to sustain existence while this change is coming about. But they object that after twenty years of loyalty and steadfast devotion, self-sustainment should be painted into her portrait as the background of her morality. It was surely something greater than a desire for self-sustainment which caused her to nurse back to life the foolish lover after he had thrown himself into the Seine because upbraided by his mother for his weakness in not resisting her enchantments. And again after he has plunged his hands into the fire and has held them there until they are consumed in order to purge his soul of her image, she calmly takes him back. She seems no less devoted to him after his qualms of conscience, during which he repeatedly makes feeble attempts to will away his fortune, providing her with a mere subsistence where he has hitherto

kept her in affluence. No one can study this poem carefully without feeling that he has met a noble woman, beautiful, devoted, self-complete and above all capable of higher growth, for there is nothing so stupid as that which is ready to die of its own perfection.

"A Light Woman" may or may not belong in this chapter, but as she has "wanton eyes" and is treating men with an appearance of affection or regard with a view to deceiving or disappointing them, we shall be obliged to leave her portrait with this group until we find another of more fitting tone. She has been out hunting with a "noose" and has caught a helpless little "Wren," one who has been caught several times before, as the poem intimates, and is more than willing to be caught again. An "Eagle," a man accustomed to high thoughts and noble actions, a man who has deservedly won a high position in the world, sees with regret his weak-minded friend tangled in her toils.

We may infer that the Wren, notwithstanding his maiden face, was about as "Light" as the woman since he was

“already too good to lose” and “seemed in the way of improvement yet” before the woman ever met him at all; but the Eagle, taking the usual view of the matter, desires to disentangle him from her snares and so plays at courtship with her. Trusting to her vanity, the great man gives her his own eyes to take with all their expression of sincere affection, while his hand seeks hers as if in earnest need. Instead of being flattered by his attentions on account of his renown and fortune, the better side of her nature rises to meet the noble side of his and she gives him herself indeed. She lies in his hand as tame as a pear, a fruit he has no desire to eat, while his friend, the Wren, goes shaking and white, eyeing him as if he were a basilisk. The noble King of Birds does not want the woman’s love and he can only cast it away. He is well aware that the woman will resent his deceptions and that the Wren regards him as a thief who has stolen away his happiness. In this dilemma the great man appeals to the public for a decision as to which of the three should be pitied.

The judgment usually given in the case

is probably that the woman has been paid in her own coin and consequently deserves no pity; that the Wren is saved from a love that could have worked no good to him, and instead of being pitied should be congratulated; that the Eagle has inflicted a just punishment for which he has received no thanks, has lost a friend and gained two enemies, and therefore is the one to be pitied. A solid truth has as many sides as a solid body, and it would be well to view the case from another standpoint. It is only justice to pity the person most who has lost most. No one would expect to sympathize so much with the child who has lost a piece of broken glass on whose sharp edges he would surely have cut himself, as with the heathen who has lost the diamond from his god's forehead and is doomed to a life of torture therefor. If the Wren was a "Light" man, one who could only call out the frivolous side of the woman's character, then she sustained no great loss in him. Neither was he wronged in being deprived of a love that was too effete to prove a lasting good to him. The woman is decidedly the loser in

that the best side of her nature sprang forth to meet the noblest thing that had ever been presented to it, only to have what good there was in her scorned and extinguished. Even the little spark of soul in a "Light Woman" ought to be respected. The fact that the Eagle stoops to her tricks shows him to be not so far removed from herself. Why should he criticise in her what he himself is guilty of? That she rose to meet his "noble self" speaks much in her favor. That he so readily adapted himself to her ignoble side speaks badly for him. The love she gave him was *her* torch of life; what right had he to extinguish it?

"The night has a thousand eyes
The day but one;
Yet the light of a whole world dies
With the dying sun.
The mind has a thousand eyes
The heart but one!
And the light of a whole life dies
When love is done."

The "Light Woman" is said to be typical of a large class of superficial women, but it would seem according to this poem that even a light woman may be true and earnest, and the one to be

hunted down and taken into a net. It is a rare instance indeed, according to statistics, when the light woman does not start out with a serious and worthy purpose in life, only to be tripped up and left to self-abandonment and despair. However weak and frivolous women may be, it is still the fact that the typical Vivian is not of the gentler sex. "Vivians" have fuddled brains; they have been intoxicated with flattery or debauched by idleness. If the "Light Woman" is a fair representative of a large class of women it ought to be no wonder so long as women are educated to despise drudgery, or any occupation that involves hard toil. Hard work is what saves people, "Drudgery is the gray Angel of Success" and of Salvation.

Neither should it be a matter of amazement that such a class of women exist so long as there are a hundred Wrens hopping about every "noose," thinking it a virtue to be ensnared. For the sake of the good men of the world, those whose lives are sound and wholesome, and for the sake of the women who trust them, one would gladly ignore the long calendar

of statistics and court records in favor of the theory that "there is just as much angel-stuff in man as in woman."

But with the figures before us both in the poem and out of it we can only deduce the conclusion that one hundred Merlins afford quite a sufficient reason for the existence of one Vivian. Flattery is more intoxicating than wine, it develops a sort of insanity. The Vivian is insane in most instances and the Merlin whom she draws into her net is a sane man. He raises the mulberry trees and the silk-worms, he manufactures the net and puts it into her hands and then deliberately jumps into it.

"What shall the Eagle do with the prize he has sought and obtained by seeking?"

Why not practice the philosophy put by our poet into the mouth of James Lee's wife, "make low natures better by his throes," "go up to Heaven for gain" and raise her somewhere above her present level! Let him show the strength of his moral fiber as well as its fineness of quality.

The woman of the poem "A Forgiveness" passes my power of credulity. If it

were not that Browning students generally admit her to be a type, it would be hard to keep from rebelling for once against our poet. It is conceivable that a man, an exceedingly gross and unreasonable one, might grow jealous of his wife's work in case that she neglected him for her books or clubs or woman's rights ideas. It is a supposable case that he might go off and disgrace himself; but that a woman should commit a sacrilege against the man she loves, because she is jealous of his work, is not to my mind a possible case. Here I believe that Browning has underestimated woman; but he has pointed a sharp moral nevertheless, though it may be inadvertently, namely, that he who would retain the love intact must share the thought and the labor; that too often a woman is shut away from her husband's work and the thought which it develops; that love is not safe when left to prey upon itself.

“What you create see that you find food for—
It shall be dangerous else.”

The woman in “The Statue and the Bust” is more reasonable, and the portrait

is a possible one. It is a supposable case that a woman who is married to a man whom she dislikes may spend her whole life in dreaming of some one else and in resolving to escape from the hateful one, that she may fly to him whom she loves. This poem may involve the theory before spoken of, the necessity of love for the perfect development of character, but it is not the chief design of the poem. The real lesson in it is the same which Goethe suggests in these words, "Every evil is to be cured at the place where it comes to the surface." Our poet means that it is better for the evil to come to the surface and be cured than never to be cured at all; that a statue can not sin and answers every purpose which a human being does who forever longs to commit a sin, but never succeeds and so wastes all of life in consequence; that it would have been better for the lady and her lover to have eloped and taken the punishment; they would have made a better use of life than continually to have kept the longed for sin in mind. The poem shows that it is better to commit a sin and so grow through remorse and suffering than to do

nothing at all. It teaches the sin of inaction, the crime of aimlessness, and not the possible good in bad experiences.

Browning has put his most repulsive of women into the poem of "Pippa Passes" but even Ottima, in her degradation, is allowed a rallying point from which she may look back with remorse on the old, and with courage in the direction of what is new and better. Browning never paints shadows for the mere sake of exhibiting his wonderful skill in the handling of blacks and grays and umbers.

Next to Ottima with her ten silk-mills, her stone palace and her broidered garments we find coarse, clumsy Tabby Bratts. It was on a broiling June day when trees were scorched with heat and parsons were praying for rain that the wicked life of Tabby Bratts was crowned with a heroic death and her name saved to poetry. Not to poetry alone, the realm of ethics must claim her case for its consideration. Through her the poet has shown, though perhaps unconsciously, that love may exist between people who have not the slightest respect for one another and that it may become a savor of

life unto life. Ned Bratts and his wife had long kept a tavern, or what was presumed to be such, although the name was a mere pretence, the house being really a rendezvous for rogues, thieves, and murderers. No burglar or horse-thief or cut-throat had come into that section for many a year without paying toll there. Drunkenness, blasphemy, wantonness were the recreation, theft, violence, and murder the occupation of the people sheltered there. Although Ned Bratts's wife Tab is a much grosser being than Ottima, there is something in the very crudeness lying back of the coarseness of her nature that gives a grim and grimy picturesqueness to the spark of goodness which flashes forth to save her brute husband and her equally brute self. Each of them is an illustration of the vulgarity of insensibility and reminds us of Emerson's conviction that "the Devil is an ass." Big Tabby and her black husband are described as elbowing their way into the crowded court-room, both with hideous frank fiend-faces in a muck sweat, their eyes uplift with horror, as if they saw hell yawning before them, and distended

nostrils that seemed to sniff sulphur. Ned Bratts makes damning confessions of crimes, even worse than the community had suspected, showing now and then in suggestive hints that Tabby's conscience had at times proved so overpowering an admonisher as to tempt them both to the verge of self-destruction, but always had they risen after sleeping on their despair, to laugh away their conscientious scruples and begin their wickedness anew. Tab, having need of some stout lace such as Bunyan in his prison manufactured, ventured into his presence to upbraid him with oaths for neglecting to supply her with it, when he reproves her for her nefarious life in such powerful language as only Bunyan could command. He likens her to a tree charred without and sloughed about with scurf, but having vital sap within. She is so affected by his vehement denunciations that she reels home, the great man's blind girl leading her, and giving her at parting, the book which Bunyan had written. Her wicked husband, none the less dear that he is wicked, since they are drawn together by common bonds of iniquity, is as deeply self-con-

victed while they read the book, as is Tab herself. And now they have come into the presence of the judges to supplicate for the punishment due their crimes, that while repentant they may be ushered into the presence of their Maker, ere Satan beguile them into back-sliding. In poor Tabby's brutal love without a suggestion of respect or decency, lay a saving power which Ottima's beauty and refinement and accomplishments never compassed.

The portrait of the girl at "The Confessional" is that of a woman whose theological doctrines over-balance her common sense. Her conscience being over-powered by her too absorbing love, she confesses her sin to her priest, who blames the sin but promises to make her love lawful if she will possess herself of her lover's political secrets and reveal them to him. She commits this sacrilege against her lover "to save his soul in his despite," and the next time she sees him he is on the scaffold. She is cast into a cell, where she spends the rest of her life in raving over the lies of the priest. She represents the typical production of the Gospel of Ex-

pediency of whatever denomination, and is the natural outcome of all theology that dares not think for itself.

“Who bends the head unquestioning
Transgresses.”

At the farthest end of the list of fallen ones, just as remote as possible from that heading, we find poor Mildred, the prime character of “A Blot in the ‘Scutcheon,” and it seems almost wrong to put her into the list at all. A motherless child, whose one misstep has so overshadowed her young life that she can not drink of the cup of salvation although it is pressed to her lips. “Fallen! indeed, how fallen?” exclaimed a sympathetic reader, “Is there only one sin that makes a woman fallen? Is not a woman just as fallen who is grossly insensible to the rights of others, or who defames her fellow beings?” Mildred is one of those unbalanced characters, without self-poise, whose conscience is so sensitive that she can not comprehend the possibility of a right to self-forgiveness, or even allow herself the benefit of any philosophy which might make her feel that self-respect, once being lost, may

ever be earned back. The key-note of the poem is found in her lover's dying words,

"For God
We're good enough, tho' the world casts us out."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LYRICAL CHARACTERS.

God's in his heaven,
All's right with the world.

PIPPA PASSES.

If you get simple beauty and naught else,
You get about the best thing God invents.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI.

BROWNING, like Goethe, gives us an occasional Song Bird among women, a character purely artistic and lyrical, a sunbeam thrown across the darkness of the world, unconsciously lighting up and renovating dark places, happy just as birds are happy because life is beautiful; unreasoning perhaps but always doing the right thing instinctively. The leading character in this group is Pippa, the heroine of "Pippa Passes." Pippa is a little working-girl

"who winds silk
The whole year round, to earn just bread and milk."

She has but one single day in the entire year which she can call her own, one holiday in which to get "a feel of heaven" and borrow strength to meet the new year's sorrow. She rises early on this glad holiday, she sings to the sun-beam in her wash-basin, sings to her lily, sings of the happiness she expects to crowd into that blessed day, and in fact sings for any reason or every reason or no reason. She will imagine herself the four happiest people in Asolo, living the life of each successively, crowding all their bliss into this one glad day. She wanders forth on her day's adventure, singing as she goes, and her songs, reaching the hearts of these "happiest people," unconsciously to herself prove turning points in their lives. Ottima and her guilty lover are stung to repentance, and rallying from their shameful love, start in a better direction; the faint-hearted patriot is nerved to slay the tyrant; the artist is taught the lesson of self-sacrifice and of heroic faith in his bride; and even the holy priest is impelled to act from godliness instead of guilty greed. Unconscious of the great purpose she has answered that

day, and unaware of the dangers she has escaped, Pippa lies down at night like a tired, sleepy child singing:

“God bless me! I can pray no more to-night. ’

Pippa is a pure poetic stroke of genius, as is Mignon in “*Wilhelm Meister*,” but she teaches a deeper lesson, the lesson of the importance of unimportant people, the lesson that God sees no distinctions, “all service ranks the same with Him.” The winding of silk is quite as important to Him as the owning of a silk mill, and the giving of one’s self to educe thought and love and piety from the stupid and sinful, as important as to slay tyrants or shrive saints. And above all she teaches that love raises its standard continually, growing more and more divine, from the shamelessness of Ottima gradually leading upward to reciprocal love between man and wife; from thence it leaps to the unselfish love of mother for child, and finally reaches the love of God, the all-sufficient love.

The first girl in “*Pippa Passes*” is another purely artistic creation beautifully sketched in a few simple lines, and shows

the mixture of good with evil, the one favorite idea most frequent in Browning. She is seated on a door-step with a group of girls set to entrap Pippa, but her thoughts are all with birds, (seeing them fly makes her wish for wings) or with the sunshiny beetle, which cannot shine for two days after his friends are killed. Phene, also, the artist's bride, is a creature of poetic fancy. An ignorant child, she has been lured into a marriage with him by some smart students who wish to play a malicious joke on the artist. They deceive him, by means of letters, into the idea that he is idolized by a beautiful and talented woman, and bring about a marriage, keeping the bride out of sight until he meets her at the altar where they are wedded. He must not hear her speak until he has taken her home. She has been instructed to recite a poem to him at that time, which shall disclose the joke and the hatred of the students; but notwithstanding her ignorance and stupidity the right judgment comes to her and saves both the artist and herself. She has lent herself as a tool to bring shame upon him, but in spite of that fact, thanks to Pippa's song, the thought

comes to him that it is a bitter thing for a man to see his lady above all need of him, and if one of them must be god and the other worshipper, why not let her be the worshipper, while he moulds this new soul, just waked up for the first time, into something beauteous. Is the unseemly stone from which he calls forth such marvels of marble loveliness, worthy of better treatment than this living, breathing being whose soul may burst forth into eternal beauty through his love and care? Were it not higher art to shape this soul which sprang into existence at the call of his voice and depends on him for its vitality?

Pompilia, of "The Ring and the Book," although partaking of the more usual and human circumstances of womanhood, is essentially lyrical in her character. Her nature is that of the singing brook, unconsciously gladdening the rocks which make its course a toilsome one, and causing blossoms to spring up in the miry, pestilential swamp through which it runs all safely to join the River of Life. She can not even read or write, and is probably the only heroine in any important literature whose ignorance is an interesting and

ideal element in her character. Living away from books, she does not live to unworthy purposes. She is so innocent and child-like that it seems almost impossible to reconcile the incredible simplicity she displays one moment with the astounding wisdom she exhibits the next. It is one of the most striking features in her character that in sudden emergencies, where rapid thought is required as well as prompt and decisive action, she displays a judgment such as no other character in the poem manifests, save the old Pope, who has had a whole life-time in which to acquire it.

Pompilia's history rather undoes our theories of heredity, and is anything but an evidence in favor of the idea so strongly insisted in by a few of our latter-day dogmatists, that impulse is always the result of long continued habit, as if men were machines and always acted by unvarying rules. If a noted miser, under some sudden impulse, should astonish everybody by making generous gifts, his impulse would not be the result of habit; or if a person of habitual equanimity should, under sufficient provocation, show

a righteous indignation, or even anger, it would not prove that anger was his habitual attitude. There are impulses which spring from an innate sense of right and justice, and not from habit, and Pompilia's hatred of her husband, when he would exert unholy authority over her, is an example of it. Her extraordinary judgment and reason are further examples of an inherent sense of justice rather than a long line of continued experiments in reasoning. Pompilia is not a rare example, she is a typical example, of latent qualities springing forth at once into full play. Her imaginative powers are shown most beautifully where on her death-bed she dreams that she sees her babe grown into manhood gently chiding his mother as if she were a too venturesome child who had left the safe streets and wandered into danger.

She likens this dreamy vision to her childhood fancies when Tisbe, her little playmate, and herself played at deciphering from the tapestries images of each other. Tisbe she discovers with a half-moon on her hair knot and a spear in her hand; while Tisbe in return imagines her

to be a rough, brown tree, whose leaves have blossomed from her five fingers. Pompilia believes that the soldier-saint, the young priest who has rescued her from her husband's cruelty, will be her true love in eternity. "No work begun shall ever pause for death!" Love will be helpful to her more and more in the new path she must tread alone, her weak hand strong because in his strong hand. Let him wait God's instant which men call years. It is through such patient souls that God, stooping, shows sufficient of his light for those who are in the dark to rise by. By the help of God's light coming to her through the priest's holy but human love, she rises to Heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOTHERS.

The noblest office of woman is not to be a mother
but to be a woman.

ANON.

BROWNING'S portraits of mothers are few in number but varied in character; they are usually background figures in family groups and do not uniformly excite our admiration. Pompilia is the most exalted type of motherhood that he has given us, and some of those mothers who have read "The Ring and the Book" wonder at the depth of mother-feeling which the poet has sounded, and think they have discovered the same line of thought in Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh." Pompilia is the very perfection of motherliness, the sweetest little mother one can imagine, although she lived but two weeks to enjoy the gift, "the little

life" which meant so much to her. Her babe is hers alone, hers only, conceived immaculate and born of love, since the father is all hatred, revenge and carnality. The hope of maternity no sooner dawns upon her than her despair is turned to a great joy. It was as if a broad yellow sunbeam had fallen from heaven to earth. She sees the birds carrying sticks and hairs and wool, she hears their songs of anticipation and her heart, too, sings that she must fly from danger, for she is summoned to protect a life more helpless than her own. How right to live now where she had prayed for death before! One of the finest expressions of Pompilia's mother-nature is given in a few lines where she says that she always gave her rose to the poor Virgin in the lonely niche, with her baby broken off from her knee, and not to the gay Madonna. She is jealous lest she shall lose her baby's first smile, is thankful that her birdling was permitted to find life among the green leaves, and realizes for the first time how Christ grew likest God in being born. Her heart wakes up to a feeling of mother-love towards her fiend-husband and she forgives him as she

would an erring son. She can not bear eternal resentment toward the man who had bestowed on her the great crown that consummates woman's life.

Very different indeed is the portrait of Pompilia from that of her own mother, a woman whose business was to all appearances to wash clothes at a public cistern, but really to direct strangers to a basement where a candle winked to guide depraved men into the den where she sustained life at the expense of her soul. This poor mother, dying in her rags, is portrayed as selling her babe that she might die easier by the price it fetched; and the picture would hardly be finished if the background were left out, a dark background to be sure, remote and mysterious, the father, no one, any one, he who came, was wicked for his pleasure, went his way, leaving no trace to track by.

Violante, the woman who buys the child, although not a mother comes into the group by virtue of the mother-spirit she shows toward this helpless babe and the care she takes of her during the seventeen years of Pompilia's life. She

displays fully as much mother-heart as many mothers do who have daughters of their own. Having no children to inherit the estates which her husband may squander, she passes the child off upon him as their own. It would be difficult to find much to criticise in Violante's treatment of the child during the first thirteen years of her living with them. She loves her with all a mother's tenderness, and Pompilia is at that age a marvel of happiness, innocence, obedience and affection. Like many mistaken mothers, Violante thinks more of seeing her child occupy a high social position in the world than a happy one, and while the maiden is yet a child, has her married to a Count who owns a large palace but has no income. Violante not only expects to see her daughter lifted into "noble" society but herself also and her simple old husband; the Count, however, thinks only of Pompilia's dowry. The Count is summed up by Pompilia as a little, yellow, hook-nosed thing, with a bushy beard resembling an owl which she once saw sitting on a boy's wrist, the urchin using him to catch birds with. Violante is not pleased

to find herself in the claws of this bird of prey. When he turns her out of his palace, she retaliates by exposing the facts of Pompilia's birth, in a way to deprive him of her dowry. This action is the most unpleasant one in Violante's history, the most selfish and cowardly, and destroys the halo which shone around her previous mother-love for her child. Up to the time of Pompilia's marriage, their relation had been ideal. Violante's hopes had been realized; her good old husband had obtained possession of his estates, and used them without wasting them, his heart had grown more kindly towards his wife, while both of them had developed such traits as it is the beautiful mission of children to evoke, unless their mission is thwarted. So far her experiment in deception had answered a good end: it had saved herself and her husband to a better life, and it had snatched the child as a brand from the burning fire, and for the sake of Pompilia and the good old father we might wish that they had been left undeceived. The confession of Violante is, however, an artistic requirement of the tragedy, otherwise we should

never have seen the transcendent goodness of Pompilia in forgiving Violante's deception and mercenary betrayal, and her affectionate loyalty to the one whom she still must call mother. Nor should we have had her pathetic justification of her own mother's crimes, nor her sudden and almost miraculous display of reasoning ability in comprehending all the factors, good and evil, in this very complex problem. Marcus Aurelius, in all his dignity, never reached the philosophy of this ignorant young girl as, lying on her death-bed, stabbed to death by her fiend-husband, she lovingly points out the ideal side in each variety of conduct involved in her case, as well as the goodness of God through it all.

Next to Pompilia, Luigi's mother in "Pippa Passes" is the most pleasing of the group. We get only a glimpse of her but that glimpse is sufficient to open a question in moral philosophy, as well as to reveal an ideal mother. Her son, a patriotic young enthusiast with an aspiration after martyrdom, whose fifteen years of life have been pressed down and running over with joy, thinks that, having

been helped from his earliest years to the best things in the world, he can trip cheerfully up the scaffold for the world's sake, and, cheered by his confederates, has resolved to free his native land from her oppressor. The mother, mistrusting that the sufferings of his fellow countrymen are exaggerated if not feigned, respectfully and delicately suggests a doubt as to the sanity of his judgment, only to be convinced that he is right. Like many other good mothers, after being reasoned down and yielding the point she comes back to the starting place and argues it all over. She complains that "patriotism seems to be the easiest virtue for a selfish man to acquire," that "a short-sighted man can see himself and the sun, but nothing between." Italy is dear to her, but the boy is dearer. Patriotic, she bids him go but still tries by all endearing means to detain him, and nearly succeeds in overcoming his resolution by mentioning his sweet Chiara, with her blue eyes upturned as if life, to her, were one long glorious surprise. Pippa's song revives his faltering patriotism and saves him to his exalted though mistaken purpose.

But the mother's philosophy leaves it an open question for the reader's consideration whether or not professional altruism is an affectation.

The mother in "The Flight of the Duchess" is the most uncomfortable woman that Browning has given us. Contrary to his usual method, that of finding some ideal side to the homely thing, he has made her entirely ugly, not one lovely attribute being mixed with her unhappy traits. She is a perfect representation of bigotry and of that peculiar kind of tyranny which insists upon doing everything according to some precedent. She is a good illustration of Gay's lines;

"When yet was ever found a mother
Who'd give her booby for another?"

Browning leaves her in the infernal regions near the beginning of the story, that the reader may peruse the poem with greater comfort.

The Louscha of "Ivan Ivanovitch" has furnished the premises for a different ethical problem in motherhood, that of cowardice. Our poet has made it one of the most damnable of sins, one not to be

forgiven in heaven or on earth. There are two virtues which Browning exalts above all others in women, courage and breadth of vision. It would be far from pleasing to weakly sentimentalists who look upon confiding dependence in woman as her one attribute that is altogether womanly, to know how emphatically our poet insists that she shall stand on her own feet. He does not appreciate clinging propensities in the least, and if he ever excuses timidity at all, it is never when child-life is at stake. We have seen that Pompilia, the most innocent, the most dependent of his women, displays a sudden courage which might have proved a ferocity, had the case demanded, when her babe's chance for existence is imperiled. The tone of the poet's feeling toward Louscha is in perfect keeping, although in contrast with his enthusiastic respect for Pompilia. Louscha is a character well-known in many literatures, the wife of a Russian workingman who takes his family to a neighboring town where he has found a month's work. Just as they are about to return home, a fire breaks out which threatens to destroy the

whole village. Her husband's assistance being needed to help extinguish the fire, he puts Louscha with her little ones into a sledge and sends them back home, giving the wife a fire-brand with which to protect them from the wolves as well as to light them on their journey.

The next that is known of her, the faithful old horse gallops into the market place, and her friends find her in the sledge, in an insensible condition, without any children. When she is restored to consciousness, she relates a pitiful story of the loss of her babes, betraying the fact that when the opportunity offered for her to throw herself to the wolves as the only possible chance for her to save her little ones, she had not the courage and impulse to do so. She half congratulates herself on her deliverance while trying to excuse her crime and conceal her cowardliness. Ivan Ivanovitch, the kindest of her friends, a man of strong arm and scant words, when he had heard her story raises his axe and deals her one swift blow which leaves her headless, saying: "God it was bade 'Act for me.'" In the murderer's trial a mother's greater right to

life, over the claim of the child, is left an open question by the poet, although he puts the wisest reasoning into the mouth of the village Pope who argues that a woman's life is crowned with completeness when God trusts into her hand the torch of life, kindled to light the world. If she let the torch fall, she is condemned beyond appeal. He leaves Louscha self-convicted at the bar of God, while her executioner, head-sober and heart-sound, who was ready to hear God's voice and resolute to obey it, is left free as air to walk abroad with a halo around his head where man's law would have put a halter. Browning students sometimes regard this woman's crime as an active rather than a passive one because the poet suggests the possibility that she flung the children out of the sledge, first one and then the other, in order to save as many as remained, until she gave the babe, last of all, to save herself. Some defend her on the ground that it would have taken greater mental, as well as moral qualities than either men or women possess, except in unusual cases, to be cool enough to meet such an emergency, and that if left to a calm de-

liberation, she would have chosen to die. The strong emphasis that Browning has put on instinct, more especially the instinct of animals to defend their young, as well as the value which he places on such instinct as that of Ivan Ivanovitch, in that he arose and slew her without hesitation, makes her crime one of insensibility or lack of instinct, rather than one of brutality. That she let drop the torch of life seems to be the important fact and not that she threw it away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BRAVE WOMEN.

"I would have my sons chaste and my daughters brave."

ANON.

"The truly brave are soft of hearts and eyes
And feel for what their duty bids them do."

LORD BYRON.

TURNING to a brighter group of faces, we find Polyxena, the heroine of "King Victor and King Charles," the impersonation of the two great virtues Browning loves to paint. Her courage, he calls "the noble and right woman's manliness." She has the power of seeing all the many sides of a thing, ideal and ugly, and she throws the mantle of loving sympathy over the admixture of ugliness and beauty which she has contemplated with open eyes and a calm mind. Polyxena sees the earnest good heart of her husband as

well as his painful sensitiveness and vacillating will, and endures his unjust suspicions with heroic fortitude while stimulating him to self-respect and courageous endurance. His kingly crown has become an oppressive weight, and he would gladly throw down royal honors for the sake of a quiet, peaceful life. Like all weak persons, and a few great ones who are in advance of their age, he is a misfit in this world which seems to be comfortable enough to those who have the courage to keep on bearing hopeless burdens or the stolidity to ignore them. Polyxena, stronger and more self-sustained, counsels him that it would be deserting his soul's charge to abdicate his throne and abjure the crown which is a gift from God. Duty is man's great concern, not happiness.

Near to Polyxena we find the heroine of "An Italian in England," a masterly sketch in rough outlines. In a few terse verses, our poet has given us a magnificent woman, although but a lowly peasant girl who works among the maize. On her way to her work following with other women in the rear of a noisy crowd of peasants, her attention is attracted by a

glove, which has been thrown for that purpose by some one hiding beneath some bushes. Giving a rapid glance around, she sees a man beckoning as for assistance, and without any show of surprise, places the glove in her bosom, strips off a branch to mark the place, and hastily rejoins the company. After an hour she returns to the spot where the glove was thrown, and finds a starving outlaw, who has taken refuge from his pursuers. The outlaw, feeling that the hopes of Italy rest upon him, has devised a falsehood to tell the girl lest she should betray him, but when he sees the calm simplicity in her face and the majesty in her attitude,

“Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm,”

he confesses to her that he is the man upon whose head a price is set, and that she can have gold in abundance if she betrays him to the State. He asks her to bring him food, paper, pen and ink, and to carry his messages to Padua. Three mornings she takes her stand in the same place, the outlaw trusting to her faithfulness as he trusts to the certainty of the

sunrise. She talks to him of her prospects, tells him with a timid grace of her lover, stout and tall, who might do much for him and for Italy if he would, but that she can not speak for him, who might have other thoughts. She will continue to bring him food and drink, and take news to his Paduan friends as her conscience dictates. The ethical point in her character given for our consideration is that she knows herself, and being certain of herself alone, is wise enough and courageous enough to be her own law. The self-sufficiency of this peasant girl is of that quality which Browning loves to delineate. There are shades of this virtue which are anything but lovely. There is nothing so self-poised as a peacock, and self-distrust may be the point on which the noblest character turns, as was the case with George Eliot.

The heroine of "In a Balcony" is not so self-poised as either of these two women, but her courage is of a more striking character, and her unfortunate circumstances move the sympathetic reader to pity while they provoke the unsympathetic to a sweeping condemnation. A

"Queen," a political machine, she has been surrounded from the earliest years by beating hearts, swift eyes and serviceable hands, professing to have no care for anything but her cause, no thought but to help her, no other love, while she has stood as a statue stands, that is pointed at as the most desirable of earthly possessions, and deserted for the first gypsy or dancing girl. While her deportment is calm and queenly, her womanliness rebels against the false parade of affection, the gait subdued lest it startle her, the speech stifled lest it alarm her ear, and similar affectations. So oppressive were these simulations to her that if one man in all the crowd had broken away from court formalities and written her a vulgar letter all of love, had caught her hand and pressed it, or if the sentinel had flung away his halbert and had thrown himself at her feet, she would have felt that there was something real in the actions of men and kissed him thankfully. As a child she belonged to the State, none of the close and endearing relations of father and mother were hers. As a wife she still belongs to the State, her husband

being chosen for her in due time as a necessary appendage to the State machinery, a political necessity and a political lie, but excusable because political, for should not the State be considered before the individual? Superior to court intrigues and pretensions and political machinations, she knows that man is man, only as he is true; and that woman is woman, only as she is human; that love is the only good that there is in life, and all else that seems good is but a shadow flung from love. When the last chance to taste of love seems dead to her, she takes her cousin Constance into her home to warm her chilled heart and save her from spiritual frost-blight. The cousin whom she has taken to keep her heart alive to tenderness is a typical product of court-life, a person with whom policy is the best honesty. She can not apprehend that a straightforward method may serve as well as an underhanded one. She is naturally a sweet, attractive woman and would probably have been an honest one if she had not been educated to put her trust in expediency and intrigue. For this reason she serves as a fine background against

which to display the straightforward courage and simple honesty of the Queen. Constance is the beloved of Norbert, a gentleman whose title is not sufficient to warrant so great a presumption as to ask for her hand. He sets to work diligently to serve the Queen, that he may earn a right to claim the woman whom he loves. The Queen sees his nobility of character and secretly loves him. She sees too, his preference for Constance, and being separated from him by her wedded condition, by his love for Constance, and by her greater age, thinks it right and beautiful that matters should have come about in just such a way and never dreams that it could have been otherwise. The Queen makes him her prime minister, and he adds another crown to the one she wears. She anticipates that he will claim the hand of Constance as his reward, and despite the pang of bitterness, has planned in her noble soul that they shall be blest supremely at her hand. In all this her womanly instincts were true to her and she was true to her womanly instincts, as women usually are when honestly dealt with. Constance does not read the Queen

aright; a smaller nature never entirely comprehends the larger one. She realizes the lavish generosity of the Queen's soul, but thinks it a thing of the past, starved to death for lack of healthful food. It is one of the most unfortunate circumstances in the destiny of Constance that she can not perceive that the Queen could act from disinterested motives or that she is capable of tenderness and self-sacrifice. Constance intuitively feels the Queen's love for Norbert, and when he begs to be allowed to ask her hand from the imperial cousin, she insists that there is no way to approach her majesty except through strategem; and instructs him against his better judgment to ask for her as being next to the Queen whom he would choose if he could, but because his heart's choice is denied him, he will take the one nearest to her, simply as he would take the ribbon she had worn. Norbert acts the part unwillingly, but he acts it too well and the Queen is thoroughly deceived into the idea that he loves her hopelessly and looks to Constance as a piece of herself. All the latent passions of her loving heart develop into a mighty force, sweeping

away the womanly instincts which had served her so surely as long as they had the truth to deal with. As the mariner's compass becomes unreliable when the magnetic pole to which it points shifts its position, so instinct must of necessity become a confusion and contradiction when the magnet to which it turns is a face with a lie in it. Not only does this passionate love sweep away the Queen's instinct, but it is ready to sweep away all the obstacles that age or royalty have reared between them. She can not give him youth or beauty, but she will throw at his feet passionate faith, love, sacrifice and constancy. She will gloriously retrieve her youth from the calamity forced upon it, and dissolve the hateful marriage. This un hoped for issue is an accident which God has sent expressly to cut the knot, and if it answers no other end than to promote her subjects' good, it were best so ordered. She would sooner leave throne or lose life than unlove him. She would face the world with her new life, her new crown. "How soon a smile of God can change the world!" With this smile of God, the love looking out at us

from the loved face, work grows play, adversity becomes a winning fight, and we discover that we are made for happiness. Courage helps courage, and as Norbert has dared to choose her, so she chooses him. When love asserts its strength and conscience its majesty, conservatism and diplomacy stand confounded. So when the Queen rises superior to her royal environments, the cousin exclaims in amazement, "Who could have comprehended?" Constance is quick to perceive the enormity of the crime which she has committed against her sovereign and benefactor. No other resource seems left to her than a complete self-surrender. Her admiration for the Queen's courage, her sense of justice, her shame at having placed the Queen in so humiliating a position, her gratitude for the Queen's unselfish and loving intentions toward her, her fears for the welfare of her lover, her womanly heart, that rebels against a happiness which shall cause another woman pain, and her feeling that Norbert can render a greater service to mankind by marrying the Queen, are all influences which cause the bewildered Constance to

resort to a complete self-sacrifice. Reasoning from the manifold data of human experience rather than from the theories of modern transcendentalists, she knows that a love like that of the Queen, suppressed and shy until invited into action and sinned against, will prove such a tempest as Æolus kept imprisoned in a cavernous mountain and sent forth at his pleasure to gather the heavens and the earth and the waters into its unsparing hand. She is too worldly-wise not to know that it has ever been and ever will be the experience of the world that love, sinned against, becomes a retributive spirit of just indignation, that sooner or later reaches and crushes its ungracious author in its relentless grasp. Constance, true to her custom of habitually resorting to expediency, and being sure of Norbert's love whether they are ever married or not, makes every effort to keep up the deception and actually transfer her lover to the Queen. Norbert acknowledges that the Queen is justified in taking such an unusual step, but with unaccountable dullness, mistakes her avowal of love for a test to try him and prove whether he will

choose the woman whom he loves or the one who can bestow a scepter and a crown. It gives her an opportunity to make a graceful retreat, calling it a jest, an expedient Constance would have known how to use to her own advantage under the same circumstances, but not the Queen. She knows no method save the direct one, that goes to the point at once. When Norbert comprehends the situation, his soul is filled with consternation and he declares the truth just as he should have done at first. His sympathy and pity are all aroused in the Queen's behalf, and when he sees her stagger under the blow he has so unwillingly dealt, as she wakens to the reality, his senses reel and the world fades from him.

He endeavors to give her another opportunity to call it all a jest. He is human enough to feel the humiliation of her situation and the cowardliness of Constance, whom he feels he should be justified in regarding as a curse. He is also manly enough to appreciate the effort Constance has made to retrieve her error through self-sacrifice and to forgive her. To him, love is the spirit's errand in this

life, the completion of the soul. It is an accident in eternity, one point in a never ending education, the bursting of a germ into eternal life, the one truth and the only truth that earth holds for us. When the Queen leaves them, Norbert consoles Constance with the assurance that they have gained life's height and no harm can reach them now. Having reached life's completeness, only some sudden death can clothe the tragic events with appropriate dignity. If the Queen sent her headsman to complete the tragedy, as we have reason to suspect, our sentiments might be shocked but the requirements of art would be answered; the master-stroke would be added to the picture. While we contemplate the portrait of the Queen, we find her to be the center of another group of psychological problems; whether or not woman is justified, when her affections have been aggressively called out or stimulated into action, in using the right which custom has conceded to man alone, as his inherent privilege, to avow a choice; whether she is justified in saving herself from a loveless marriage which the State has forced upon

her, the interests of the State being paramount to that of the individual; whether, it being granted that love is the chief end of life, any means of securing it are legitimate, methods being nothing and motives everything; whether love can be shot like a bullet at the appropriate mark, and be made to adhere there at the bidding of "well-trained affections;" whether or not love for one is worthless, except in so far as it broadens and deepens into a love for everybody and everything else; and lastly whether one is justified in remaining true to a love which through its own eagerness, has ceased to command perfect respect, as did Norbert in his loyalty to Constance.

CHAPTER X.

MAGNANIMOUS WOMEN.

"Our petty souls, our struggling wits,
Our labour'd puny passion fits,—
Oh may she scorn them still, till we
Scorn them as bitterly as she."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

NEXT to the Queen and not unlike her is Colombe of "*Colombe's Birthday*." The circumstances of her life are dramatic but not painful, and there are no unpleasant features in her character which could possibly call forth a defense from the sympathetic reader or unkindly criticism from the severe one.

She is one of the most pleasing of Browning's women, and reminds us of certain heroines in the dramas of Shakespeare, who are always beautiful and excellent, always people of high courage and exalted virtue, never failing to do the proper thing. If Colombe is ever criti-

cised at all, it is because she is too close a copy of the usual conventionally good woman of poetry and fiction. She rather excels Shakespeare's women, in that she is a more subtle philosopher, a woman closer to the universal heart. From a retired castle on a river's bank where she has queened it over water-buds during all her happy young life, she is conveyed with noisy joy to be crowned Duchess of Juliers court, where she rules for one year, apparently beloved by her people and her courtiers. Before twelve months have passed, a prince, her cousin Berthold, appears with a greater claim to the throne, and her presumably loving courtiers become cautious and desert her, or halt on neutral ground to await the issue. In that short time she has experienced the worthlessness of court affections, and yet she feels that to part with her ducal crown would be to perish. When Valence, a poor advocate who secretly loves her, comes from a neighboring village to plead the cause of starving men, and Berthold, the rightful prince, offers her not only a dukedom, but a prospective empire if she will accept his royal hand, she gladly

leaves Juliers Court and the ranks of royalty, to be the wife of the advocate. His love for her is a brighter crown than the Ducal coronet; the love of the suffering, down-trodden, starving people, whose cause he pleads, the only empire worthy of her ambition. Although Colombe is a conventional heroine, the grimy, hungry laborers, painted into the background of her future, relieve the picture from the monotonous tone too often chosen by dramatists who prefer to leave their heroines with ease and prosperity as a reward of self-sacrifice rather than to endow them with a field for continued action; for whatever is the chief concern of the masses of common toiling humanity, be it joy or sorrow, is the principal event of any era and always the most fitting background for a great work of art. In this drama the ethical climax is reached, not in the character of the heroine but in that of the advocate, who attains to an unusual if not improbable altitude, in that when he feels that his love is hopeless, he can content himself that he has evolved her love, if not for himself, at least for another. The knowledge, the memory of her is

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amplest recompense. Such incarnate self-abnegation is not the natural feeling of humanity. It is as if a hungry man were satisfied with the remembrance of a feast.

Lady Carlisle of the poem "Strafford" illustrates a variation of the same philosophy shown in the character of Valence, but more extreme and consequently less pleasant. The mercury of her self-regard has reached the absolute zero. She is brave and courageous as all women are who sacrifice themselves completely to men who can neither appreciate nor understand them, but her lack of self-assertion is repulsive because it does violence to the law of compensation in nature which demands a full return for all it gives. Nature never writes "I promise to pay" into her promissory notes unless she writes also "for value received." It is not unusual for a woman to sink her individuality in that of her husband, and forget that she is a person as well as a wife. Such a woman is supposed to have the recompense of being recognized at least as a unit or a fractional part of a unit by the husband. But for a woman to leave herself entirely out of the question that

she may promote the fortunes of a man who continually counts her a zero, is beyond reason. When does self-sacrifice cease to be a virtue and become a weakness, is the question involved in her character. The same subject has been well handled by Herbert Spencer in the chapter "*Egoism versus Altruism*," of his "*Data of Ethics*." To consider her character from Spencer's standpoint, conforming as closely to his language as is convenient, Strafford's acceptance of Lady Carlisle's favors implied a readiness on his part to get gratification at her cost. He helped himself to her time, her interest, her attention, whenever it suited his convenience, without the least idea of reciprocating her devotion, and unlike most of Browning's women she demands no reciprocity. Browning students, especially women, regard Lady Carlisle as one of the most exasperating of his heroines, and her self-abnegation could hardly fail to provoke a spirited discussion in any class engaged in the study of this drama. "Weak! why weak?" exclaims an earnest reader. Is it a weakness for women to be true regardless of wrongs and discourage-

ments? I call that Christ-like!" Let Spencer reply: "Ethics has to recognize the truth that egoism comes before altruism." "Egoism and altruism must balance each other." Self-regard carried to the extent of enjoying a return of the interest given, is legitimate and essential. Whether it was a weakness or a strength in Lady Carlisle to give everything and get nothing, it is repugnant to the human side of people in general for a woman to give her personality away. Such a love is always counted against a woman when it might not be counted against a man. It is hardly probable that Lady Carlisle will ever have many admirers, or that Browning meant she should. She is not well balanced, nor is any other woman who has no idea whatever of her own worth. Men respect women only as they respect themselves. Women are valued at their own estimate of themselves. It never pays a woman to humiliate herself, to meet selfish people, nor is it the Christ-spirit to sacrifice a life for the temporal interest of one human being. Christ died to save the world, and He would no doubt have lived to save the world if life would

have accomplished His purpose instead of death; but He would neither have lived nor died to promote the temporal welfare of one individual, especially if that temporal welfare was not calculated to raise the person into a finer spiritual atmosphere. Self-sacrifice is recognized as the most beautiful of all virtues, but even self-sacrifice has its limits beyond which it ceases to be beautiful and becomes absurd and even harmful. There is a vast difference between dying to save a world of sinners to eternal life, and living to feed the selfishness of an unappreciative man, whose selfishness but grows the larger the more it is fed.

The wife in "A Woman's Last Word" invites a similar criticism, yet she illustrates a problem, almost entirely different, namely, love *versus* justice. She is courageous, if courage consists in sacrificing a petty justice rather than a great affection. The poem is a short one, but long enough to give us a typical woman, yes, the whole race of women, from the foundation of the world to the present moment. It has ever been true that whenever woman has risen a little out of the slave condition in which

she was originally held by man, she has done it through that divine love which is her essential characteristic, rather than through any sense of justice in man, for man in his primitive state, according to our best scientists, had no sense of justice, and has acquired it only as it has served as an expedient. He found that justice was the best policy, and so he acquired it as a matter of policy. The woman of the poem under consideration has had a dispute with her husband, and he evidently means to continue it. He believes in explanations. He has not found out that explanations never explain and that forbearance is more becoming than proofs and counter-proofs which prove nothing; that love can be probed until there is nothing but the probe left. The wife, with more magnanimity, feels that words are the wildest of all wild things, and that there is nothing so false as truth when it is exalted above conscience. A small truth may be urged at the expense of a whole world of affection, and conscience may be wrecked to preserve a petty morality. Truth insists on the letter of the law, conscience on the

spirit of it. There is nothing so absolutely truthful as a machine and nothing with so little conscience. Truth is a revelation of mathematics, conscience is a revelation of divine sympathy and divine harmony. Truth is the two-edged sword that slays the enemy, conscience is the Florence Nightengale that holds the cup of cold water to his dying lips and points him to heaven. The loving, conscientious wife nestles her weary head on the heart of the truth-loving husband and leaves it an open question for the world to decide whether she is strong or whether she is weak. Right here it is interesting to notice how Victor Hugo has treated the same point in "Ninety-Three." He sums up the lesson of the whole book in one line, "Above the Balance is the Lyre." How far may love surrender to injustice without becoming a crime, is the moral mystery which envelops this woman and women in general. It is seldom that woman is placed in any position in life where she may not press a small truth to the exclusion of a large one. However strong our poet makes it for woman to bear a private injustice, he never calls it a

strength in her to ignore a wrong which is extended to all womankind.

The bravery of the Guendolen of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" is unquestionable. There is no doubt that it takes an uncommon courage for a woman to desert her lover, if need be, that she may stand by the side of the unfortunate woman whose life is blighted by a false step. Guendolen sees that error should be the rallying point for starting in the right direction, instead of the freezing point where the soul congeals into a useless mass, and she begs Mildred to consider that the world has been won many a time by just such a beginning. It never occurs to Guendolen that there is any other way of doing, and when her lover would have her accompany himself and the friends who have deserted the unhappy one whom he calls unworthy for them to so much as behold, she exclaims—

"Where's my place
But by her side, and where's yours but by mine?"

Guendolen's philosophy would be a grand one if it went only so far as to recognize error as a guide board point-

ing away from error, but it goes farther. She teaches that friendship should have a holier use than to serve people only while they are worthy of the service; it is as base to desert a friend for his error as it is to desert a man because he is starving, a point quite worthy the attention of those who invite friendship and even demand it as a right. For how often is it seen that he who builds an altar to Friendship with the most eagerness and begs most humbly of that goddess to favor his shrine with her presence, and complains most bitterly at her tardy, cautious shyness, is the first to desecrate the shrine his own hands have built. Human relations are not lightly to be assumed and thrown off. The man who can love his friend only while the friend stands in no need of his love, is unworthy to be beheld by the meanest dog, which if his master were in disgrace, would push his way through all the hooters to gain the master's side, go off with him and all his infamy to the first ditch he might choose to die in. This is a philosophy which has been echoed in the best of human hearts ever since hearts have been human, and

bursts forth with new freshness wherever Browning's sun-like genius warms the earth-covered germ. To Guendolen, life is a material to be used wrongly until one knows how to use it rightly, a clay from which the amateur may model absurdities until his hand grows so skillful that it may carve the liliated statue from the purest marble. Guendolen leaves room for growth in character as the superior person must. She sees the way things are going, and does not look upon a point of character in a human being as she would regard a part in a piece of machinery, as a stationary and unchangeable thing that has always been so and hence always must be so.

CHAPTER XI.

A PICTURE OF CONSTANCY.

"A great heart beating in a tear."

SIDNEY LANIER.

"Oh, tell me how love cometh!

It comes unsought, unsent.

Oh, tell me how love goeth!

It was not love that went."

FRIEDRICH HALM.

IT has well been said that to delineate truly some of Browning's characters, one needs the constructive ability of the skillful anatomist who, having one bone given, can rightly determine the exact proportion of all the other bones in the skeleton. In the case of Elvire of the poem "Fifine at the Fair" we should be fortunate if we had so much as one of her bones from which to determine her character. We are, however, supplied with a few of her husband's ribs, and by their rattling we are left to determine as best we may

what she is *not* and perhaps what she *is*.

The poem is a monologue in which the husband is the speaker. He represents his wife as pouting and weeping over his heresies, disagreeing with all his immoral sophistries, and almost before we are aware of it we find that a wrong has proven that a right exists, and a noble woman stands before us. Elvire, although a character suggested rather than delineated, appeals to our admiration, and yet more to our sympathies. In her we find the natural every-day woman, whom we are accustomed to meet commonly. She is not heroic or unselfish, nor has she any commanding virtues to distinguish her from the average woman whom the average man claims as wife or sister. She has the usual hopes and fears of women, her likes and dislikes. She is affectionate, jealous as far as is right, she smiles and frowns, and above all she is faithful and true. She is not a creation intended to interest us; the philosophy of the poem needs her and so she is there. The philosophy of the poem is the rambling reasoning of the husband, and it is only by giving careful study to his logic, or want of

logic, that we are enabled to arrive at any correct synthesis of his character or that of his wife. The introduction to the poem is a quotation from Molière's play of "Don Juan" and contains the keynote of Browning's poem, which is the possible good that may lurk in inconstancy, or Don Juanism. If we should name the husband Don Juan, in honor of Lord Byron's questionable hero of the same name, we should do the rascal no injustice. Our poet intends him to represent those men who are fickle, if not really loose in their morality; but Browning, unlike Lord Byron, has a dignified and serious purpose in the creation of his "Don," so serious indeed that many Browning disciples unwillingly assert that he has projected his own theories into the speech of the husband as well as painted the logic of a man intent on justifying himself for his inconstancy to his wife, reasoning his vice into a virtue. A closer look into the poem satisfies many good students that Robert Browning does not approve of the philosophy of the fellow whom he has taken for his model. Unlike many poets, Browning can look

at all the numerous sides of a subject and reason on each side, though he may believe in but one of them, and finally leave it for the reader to judge for himself as to what is the most conclusive evidence.

Any reader of this poem will discern that whether or not Browning approves of the sentiments of the rascally husband, he surely feels a little closer kinship to him than to the saintly Elvire. The Don is one of those natural clowns whose heart fires up with lawlessness at the sight of a circus tent, and whose feet leap at the sound of a fife and drum. He longs to give respectable society the slip and share the life of strolling tumblers on the trapeze. He invites his wife to link arm in arm with him that they may trip and skip off to see the strolling performers, not a very dignified way of inviting so stately a woman to an entertainment, although it may be an artistic beginning to a poem. As the two people go forth to the fair, the Don's exclamations are anything but agreeable to the serious Elvire. Why is it that whenever a faithful few combine to throw off the yoke of

respectability they seem to relish life the more? What pearl is it these trapeze performers pick from the rubbish, which correct people had swept clean out of doors? Why is it that so frank a laugh goes up when the vagrants find out how kind a parent they have despised? How comes it they count so cheap what we hold so dear? He would like to put down in black and white what compensating joy it is that turns lawlessness to law and makes destitution wealth. These questions, which mean that the Don is trying to excuse himself for his longings to be free from the restraints of decent society, are answered by a slow shake of the head and a melancholy smile. His wife presses his arm with her pale fingers, and her sad eyes probe his heart in search of some evidence of the old love that had once found her presence all the freedom it could wish, and her sigh is almost a sob. He proceeds with his defense, taking Fifine as an illustration of what shall make his meaning plain. He pictures this gypsy with the Greek-nymph nose and "eyes that spill the light around" as tripping forth bringing sunshine on her

spangled hips. She is mischievous and mean, but free and flower-like. She knows no law but loveliness. Her morality consists in sustaining her life in any convenient way just as a bird's morality consists in stealing stuff to make its nest that it may rear its young, and the Don makes her indecorous methods of obtaining a living just about as innocent as the pretty thievery of the bird. He compares her to that lily which packs a delicious spice around its pistil to entice unwary insects by its dear and damning scent until they are drowned to their hearts' desire, when she takes their lives to satisfy her pride, as well as to sustain her life. The Don places a whole franc in the tambourine which Fifine holds out, and it affords him great pleasure that her face inflames at his lordly courtesy or else because she suddenly felt a kinship between them, a subtile attraction as when hand clasps hand in the dark. In trying to demonstrate the value of Fifine, the Don asks his wife to imagine herself a phantom, like Helen of Troy, who according to Herodotus never saw Troy at all, but was carried into Egypt and safely

kept while her phantom was sent in her stead, it being great sport for the gods to see armies of men contending over a shadow, while the true Helen's self sat safely far away in tranquil solitude, and could estimate the worth or worthlessness of the phantom Helen, who inspired such passion. In the same way could the true wife, the tearful Elvire, judge better of her husband's high appreciation of her value and of his lower estimate of Fifine. When the wife smiles at the effort he is making to convince her that his philosophy is one which proves her superior value he thanks the smile that dries away her tear and clears up the sky which was overcast. He congratulates her that she has stood the test, that he has not vexed her in vain, and that she knows how clowns having been proved good, she may be proved still better. He has succeeded in allaying the suspicions of the jealous wife, and considers it safe to continue his monologue, in the course of which he compares Fifine to a briny sea and Elvire to the heaven of sunshine and air above it. It is no matter if the whole body sinks beneath the brine if only the nose keep above it

to convey the news that light and life are in reach. The brine is too gross an element to live in, yet he is upborne by it, and is safe so long as his soul can obtain a dose of life-breath and gain air enough to illude the waves with a hope that he who swims may some time learn to soar. Every time he ducks his soul and her truthward yearnings deeper into falsehood, her nose and mouth are fitted less to bear the old briny bitterness. Such experiences prove that air is the essential good, and not the sea. And yet our business with the sea is not with the air, but just of the water, watery. No particle of the false do we acquaint us with but we mount a pitch above it, find that our heads are dealing with the truth while our hands are exploring the false below. By practicing with what is false we reach the true. But practice we must, and each man must practice for himself. The more we find that we can conquer the inconstant waves, the more are we minded to shake ourselves dry and leave them wholly for the safe land. We prefer the sky to the sea, the lark to the shrimp, and by dabbling in the froth, that tawny wavelet

that just trickled off, Fifine, we seize the true, Elvire. The philosophy of the Don is that life is given us for the sake of getting wisdom from every possible source, and especially from physical sources; to find the divinity in homely and even in vulgar animal affections; that man should run life's race with his feet and legs, not crave wings to fly over its common duties or its passions; that the thing which is good and graspable should be preferred to what can be reached only by faith; that sense has a stronger claim on this earth than soul. The most disagreeable part of the Don's philosophy is that it is right to associate himself with Fifine in unholy relations, if thereby he may learn from her inconstancy that which shall develop in him a greater appreciation of the true. What the consequence may be to her he need not stop to consider. There are ways of using people as helps to moral or mental development or worldly advancement that inflicts no injury on them, but the Don's theory does not take that into consideration. Another unpleasant feature of his sophistry is that the error which he defends is a prospective one and so has

the flavor of intentional wrong. When a man has stumbled into an error and is trying to construct a philosophy which may help him to take heart and rally his energies for a start in the direction of truth, he deserves and will get the sympathy of the nobler part of humanity. But for a man to commit an error, knowing it to be an error, in the expectation of getting good thereby, is moral suicide. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that learns through evil. The philosophy of Elvire, if we might hear her speak, would be very different. To her the chief end of life is to learn to be true. It is better to be true than to be happy. Under no consideration is one man justified in using another as if he had no sensibilities. Under no circumstances has a man a right to sacrifice another as a means of education or self-advancement. That growth which comes to the character through the sacrificing of others is a growth which the upright man will despise. The only lasting happiness which one can reach is to learn to be true, or a condition in which nothing else will be a complete satisfaction. Elvire sees no reason why a self-

evident truth is better worth belief after having been proved a truth than it was before. Nor can she understand why the Don can not select Elvire to develop him to a greater knowledge of the truth in preference to Fifine. Elvire dreads nothing so much as inconstancy. She tries to follow her husband through his sophistry, and is always ready to agree with him when his arguments conclude with a proof that she is the one being for him to love. But her saintliness is vexatious to him. It betrays a fear lest earthly things shall seem as real to him as the heavenly. He can not endure the expression in her face, the reproachfulness and scorn so strangely blent with the submission, and there he wins the sympathy of husbands in general. There is nothing more repellent than a reproachful face.

When the Don and his wife reach home in the twilight, he tells her that he wants no more of that fickle element, Fifine, that foam-flutter, which when clutched only blisters the hand that grasps it. He upbraids Elvire that she pauses with such a pallid, distrustful face, on the threshold.

He beseeches her to touch him that he

may know that she is real flesh and blood. To be sure he has marched with one defenseless hand carelessly open behind him, and some one has pushed a letter into it between the glove and palm. He suggests that in order to foil suspicious folks, like Elvire, he may have put a double-yolk of yellow gold between the two silver whites of the nest egg that he placed in Fifine's tambourine when her face inflamed as the sly act telegraphed his character to her. Perhaps that nest egg had persuaded a family to follow. He will go and clear up the mystery. He tells Elvire not to threaten him with any farewell for he will be back in five minutes; that time will suffice to explain matters. He departs in search of Fifine and the reader is left to ask, "Did he ever come back?"

This abrupt ending of the poem proper is unsatisfactory, but if it followed the career of the gay husband any farther, it would take away the breathing time during which we flatter ourselves that we have succeeded in constructing not a skeleton but a living, loving woman, white to ghostliness to be sure, but none the less real. We congratulate the poet that he did not

deprive us of the mystery, for would not the poem become flat and inartistic if the Don were to come back just then and there with more false logic and subtle schemes? Would he not deprive us of the pleasure of discussing the result of his departure? Surely it would be as if Hawthorne had declared that Donatello did have ears. If the Don is true to his philosophy he will remain away until he can stand upright where he only crawled before. Having developed the moral muscles of his feet by climbing, he can kick away the scaffold, Fifine, which has become useless now that he has risen to a higher plane, and he will no doubt return to Elvire, expecting to find her as constant as ever and far more rosy on account of the happiness she has experienced through his conduct. But his expectations, we hope, will not be gratified. Unlike James Lee's wife, Elvire sees no good nor will see any good in the thing that has no permanence. Fidelity is her watchword. She knows that people can always develop their knowledge of truth in a side-by-side push for something worthy, but there is neither piety nor

growth in disagreement, and only fools expect nourishment to come of wanton non-assimilation. Where James Lee's wife, with more stoicism and broader vision, recognizes good in anything which evolves love or thought, though it be lost forever after, Elvire, with a keener sense of justice, sees only the swinehood that hath no remedy.

Ere we depart we give one long wistful glance backward toward the doorway where the white figure stood draped in night's dark mantle, when lo, a vision! a lone man writing what shall serve to show that death re-united him to the wife whom he deserted. Even death has no power over love, and her phantom stands before him to attest

“Love is all, Death is nought!”

CHAPTER XII.

RECIPROCITY.

Let friend trust friend, and love demand its like.

ROBERT BROWNING.

God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love.

ROBERT BROWNING.

THOSE people who are accustomed to look upon life from exalted standpoints and who consider its business a serious matter, can but regard the mechanical methods of creating laughter, used by professional humorists, with a feeling of weariness if not of absolute discomfort. To the man who considers the elevation of humanity the only supreme ideal worthy of a life's devotion, one can offer no greater indignity than to make his cause the axis on which fun rotates. So great is his purpose that he can not laugh

about it himself, nor can he enjoy the amusement which another may derive from it. Browning, on the contrary, while he carries the whole world in his heart and never lays down the burden, finds the task as amusing as it is urgent. Browning is a poet who could hardly fail to attract earnest readers. He is not the poet for triflers, and those who appreciate the so-called "humor" of the day are rarely the people to draw any lesson from his pages. The readers of Browning admire him greatly for his wit, but more for the majesty of his seriousness. They would be shocked if he were accused of levity, or if he were called a humorist, and yet it is his distinguishing characteristic that when he is treating the most serious subjects most seriously, he throws in a bit of fun that breaks like sunlight over the sober landscape. The character of Don Juan is levity itself, and yet the poem is a sermon. "Sordello" is the summing up of the deepest experiences of the human soul, and yet the illustrations, interjected to press home some of the noblest lessons, are mirth-provoking in the extreme. It has been left to Browning to teach us the

dignity of humor, to show us that its mission may be more ardent and incisive than that of tragedy or of tears. Guendolen's wit in no wise interferes with the loftiness of her purpose. In "The Ring and the Book," which is the very climax of solemnity and dignity in writing, laughter dances among the dismal scenes as lightning leaps from cloud to cloud. Browning deals with life as if it were all a merry-go-round, in which hatred, falsehood and shame are poor riders, sure to fall out and come to grief, while truth and love must of necessity come off with flying colors. So far from feeling that he has treated the raising up of humanity with indignity because he has made it the pivotal point around which hilarity whirls, we realize that humanity has waked up to the joyousness of earnest living. When Browning laughs, sin trembles; if he could live long enough he would laugh evil out of the world entirely, as Cervantes laughed false chivalry out of it. Every form of fun seems to be enjoyed by him from great jokes to small. He makes fun of Browning for his lack of style but "O ye gods! the mighty sense." He calls himself a

Don Quixote, and enjoys his own ridiculous idiosyncrasies as much as did that gallant knight his delusions. He portrays the teasing lover, and condescends to amuse himself as do people of small wit by taking the "contrary side" for the sake of argument.

In the poem "The Glove" he gives us the "other side" of an old story which has always been supposed to have no "other side," and under the smile of humor, has hidden a lesson of good faith and constancy.

Every school-boy knows Leigh Hunt's rhyme—

"King Francis was a hearty king and loved a royal
sport,
And one day, as his lions fought, sat looking on the
court."

Among the courtiers sat the Count De Lorge with the fair dame whom he professed to adore. When the king swore that no one there would be so fool-hardy as to face the lions, the lady to whom De Lorge was weighing out "fine speeches like gold from a balance" threw her glove before the lions to test the truth of his chivalrous protestations. De Lorge made

one leap over the barrier, and seizing the glove returned as quickly, not to place the glove in the lady's hand but to throw it into her face.

"By heaven," said Francis, "rightly done!" and he
rose from where he sat;
"No love," quoth he "but vanity, sets love a task like
that."

So much for the old version of the story, and now for Browning's "other side."

From the expression in the lady's face, some poet in the crowd discovers that the action was not a light one prompted by vanity, but a painful experiment, a necessary crucible in which to try his golden speeches, even though her own heart be seared at the same time. The smoke in her face, the scoffing of the court, she feels is well deserved.

"To know what she had not to trust to,
Was worth all the ashes and dust, too."

The poet follows her out of the court which hoots at her, and he asks as a favor an explanation of her motives. She tells him that she has heard too long of deeds which were proved by words alone; that

she had thought of the dangers which had been encountered by all sorts of men before the lions were safely lodged in their prison, from the poor slaves who set the snares in the desert, with no king or court to applaud, to the page who leaped over the fence of the pit that he might recover the bonnet he had accidentally dropped there, and which might cost him a week's wages. She preferred to prove the meaning of "death for my sake" while she had the power, rather than to wait for time to define it. The poet watches her as she sweeps away and he sees a youth keeping as close as he dare to her doorway. He is plebeian, but the calm fervor of his bearing as he eagerly steps forward to serve her is that of a man who would not take it ill if you should whisper in his ear,—

"Friend, what you'd get, first earn."

When she carries her shame away from the court and marries the plebeian youth, the poet dares predict a life of happiness for her. The lesson of the poem is that a woman would better know what she can depend upon, and that it is worth her

while to get at the worst at once. It does not take long for pretension to shrivel up: honesty is not always delicate and saves herself much trouble sometimes by hurrying a little to get at results; it is well for a woman to know how to add up the column of her lover's pretensions and see if they balance with his intentions.

Cristina of the poem "Cristina and Monaldeschi" is a portrait of Queen Christina of Sweden, whose character presented a complication of virtues and faults pushed to an extravagant excess. History tells us that the masculine education which she received from her father, Gustavus Adolphus, and her guardians subsequent to his death, gave her a lasting antipathy to the employment of women, and that her love of independence caused her to reject the princely suitors who aspired to her hand. She was fond of royal power and splendor, but abdicated her throne because the official duties of her life wearied her. She abjured the Protestant religion, dismissed her women, and, laying aside the habit of her sex, assumed man's garb. She went to France, where she caused the murder of Monaldeschi,

her Master of the Horse, on account of his betrayal of some secret. According to her own account, her pride and virtue always rose superior to her disposition, which was ambitious, amorous, impatient, haughty and satirical.

The poem "Cristina and Monaldeschi" is a monologue in which Cristina is the speaker. She addresses Monaldeschi as her betrayer in words fraught with ominous irony. She compares him to Diane, the effeminate, the cold inconstant moon whose sign, the crescent, they see repeatedly carved with the Salamander sign of King Francis, together with the words "Quis Separabit?" She likens herself to King Francis, the strong, the constant, also to the salamander which is his symbol, a being, human in form, but whose element is fire. This flame-fed creature is injurious only to the fools who think fit to play in fire. In this comparison lies a subtle warning of what her lover's fate shall be.

She has raised up Monaldeschi from the position of a servant to that of a close confidant. She had hated him, until moved by compassion, because he loved

her, she had stooped to lift him up to her, destroying the rounds of the ladder as he rose, that he might find no opportunity for retracing his steps. She had long stood alone, a solitary peak, which he, spurning the earth, had climbed before men's eyes. Would he now descend and pity her, left alone? Would he become her "friend" where he had sought to be her lover? Would he *like* her a little at first, less afterward, and loathe her at last, it not being safe or expedient for him to declare at once his intention of discarding her wholly? If he has tired of standing there for men to wonder at let him kneel and so cure his giddiness. Did he surmise when he climbed up to her that a retreat would be easy? Since he had chosen to pose as her lover for public gaze, she will give him the statue's privilege, to keep on posing. If he tire of kneeling he may crouch at her feet while she stands guard over prostrate love.

After reminding Monaldeschi of a promise to keep her secret as sacredly as the tombstone pavement hides the corpse below, a vow which he had sealed with the sign of the cross at the basin of holy

water, an oath which he had broken, she calls forth her four friends from the dark gallery, to whose entrance she has lured her inconstant lover. One friend, a priest, hears his confession and at her request absolves and blesses him, after which the remaining three stab him to death. The holy father stands aghast, but she asks him as a plea in her own justification what one word of that coward's confession he would reveal, though she should give him the Swedish crown, which she had abjured because it prevented her from loving. If the priest were so faithful to the confessions made him, how much more should the lover be faithful to his vows.

One can but feel, in reading this poem, that despite the savage cruelty the poet has depicted in the character of Cristina, his sympathies are enlisted in her behalf; that he has made death the fit conclusion or at least the natural subsequent of love profaned.

The Cristina of the poem and the Christina of history have one point of difference. History says that Monaldeschi betrayed her secrets, but I can not find that it makes him her lover. Christina

patronized art and was an exceptionally good ruler. From historical accounts it hardly seems that love was the main point in her character. "Why," asks one of our critics, "is it customary for poets to make the lives of women center about love, as if that were the only interest the world holds for them?" If Browning is a culprit in this respect, and we suspect he is to some extent, he is certainly a great improvement on those writers who paint angels and madonnas instead of loving women. And he certainly has selected a safer ground than did Dante, who when he reaches Paradise finds Beatrice standing unmoved with her eyes fast fixed upon the eternal wheels; instead of receiving him with the love that his life's devotion might seem to warrant, she proceeds at once to give him a lesson in astronomy, and her theories on the subject have since then all been proven false. Art keeps pace with history, and as fast as woman lifts her head out of the flat one-tone of ignorant affection into the more varied and more intellectual realms of interest, just so rapidly will the deeper and more complex modeling be painted

into her portrait. Although Browning might have depicted Christina just as correctly from a different point of view, the ferocity of her affection is in perfect keeping with the history of human feeling and is intended to illustrate the principle in nature that "Love the gift is love the debt."

CHAPTER XIII.

COMPLEXITY OF CHARACTER.

“Woman’s at best a contradiction still.”

POPE.

IN “The Legend of Pornic” we find a woman whose character does not interest us because it is developed about love as a central point. We find at least one woman in Browning whose thoughts were as distant as possible from the love of man, as well as from the love of mankind. The girl of Pornic (she was hardly a woman) is portrayed as being too pure for this life as far as people could discern, and hence she was called to blossom in heaven. Her face, which was like a silver wedge amid a yellow wealth of golden hair, was so white and saintly that her survivors passed the sentence that she was meant for heaven and had turned an angel before the time. While she lay on her bed

dying as some delicate evening dies, her breath nearly gone, and her friends putting the cross to her lips, a sudden flush came into her cheek and a sparkle of interest into her eyes, and she broke forth into an earnest entreaty that her hair might be left undisturbed. All other possessions might go but that was the last grace she had which was all her own. When this passion was vented she lay dead. Her parents and friends wept without degree as they kissed the white face which was crowned by the great golden hair, curled around the brow, coiled beside her cheek and pressed down flat about her neck and over her breast without a gap until it reached her gown. She was buried beneath the altar, the robe and pall untouched, the friends keeping saintly state out of respect for her pure life and untimely death. Only one frailty could be imputed to her, she knew the worth of her golden hair. In after years when the pavement above her resting-place was taken to pieces for repairs, some boys, who were prying about for trifles which could be of no use to the dead, found a gold coin. The priest, who

remembered the girl's last request, inwardly digested the case, and gave orders for them to dig deeper. When they came to the decomposed coffin-lid, there lay the girl's skull wedged amid a mint of money which she had hidden in her lavish hair. Thirty gold pieces, and every piece of due weight, were counted. The priest took the pelf which the grave had yielded up, saying that it would build a new altar and that it took but a slight tilt to tumble a saint to earth.

In the girl of Pornic, Browning has portrayed more than a mere miser. He has involved her in the mystery of complexity of character, a lesson which some of the people who "think out beyond the limits of ordinary minds" would do well to learn.

It has been one of the great faults of the world, and is yet, to judge of character by a single virtue or error, as if the whole character were comprised in it. Character, like a composite number, has many factors, and one factor is not the whole product. In a previous chapter we have seen that Browning has made the abuse of the confessional a point of attack; but the circumstances attending the confession

of the Pornic maiden, he uses for expressing his convictions, that notwithstanding Bishop Colenso's disbelief in the literal inspiration of Holy Scriptures, he himself finds reasons and reasons for supposing the Christian faith a true one; the first reason being that it is the faith which launched her dart point-blank at the head of a lie and taught the corruption of the human heart.

The mixture of good and evil in human nature is again outlined in the poem "Count Gismond" where in Browning's favorite verse, the monologue, the Count's wife tells her intimate friend the circumstances of their courtship and marriage.

She had been left an orphan in the care of two cousins, whom she supposed to love her, but who, under pretences of affection, were really scheming to ruin her reputation. Her face was too fair, her manners too pleasing, her popularity too over-topping to please their jealous natures, and it became their ignoble but secret ambition to destroy her good name.

It was her birthday, and her cousins, forgetting as she supposed, that no crowd of strangers could make up for the loss of

her parents whom she yet mourned, had invited a company of friends to celebrate the occasion and crown her queen of the festivities. She arrayed herself in her festal robes, singing gayly her birthday song and adorning herself with roses. Too innocent to be suspicious of others, she did not notice that her beauty caused the jealous cousins pain. One least word from them, revealing their feelings, would have stopped the show. They too were beauteous even to queenliness and needed no adornments as she did to enhance their charms. Quietly they let her adjust the last rose in her garland, fling her last look on the mirror, and each giving her an arm, they descended the castle stairs where the troop of merry friends kissed her cheeks and called her queen. They made her stoop under the canopy and take her state and throne amid the applause of the friends who had come there to celebrate her Queen's-day. When all other eyes were bent upon her and she was about to present the victor's crown, the Tourney prize, the two cousins cast their envious eyes to the ground while Count Gauthier, their accomplice, stalked boldly

forth and thundered "Stay!" The assembly waited for his explanations, when he commanded them to proceed no farther, to bring no crowns, but rather torches and a penance-sheet to wind about her.

"Let her shun the chaste
Or lay herself before their feet."

Should she whom he himself had profaned be their Queen? For the sake of that purity which he and they held so dear, let not her, the polluted, present the crown.

The innocent maiden, bewildered beyond all power of speech, no more thought it possible to answer such a charge than that a body could make reply if an engine were fastened upon it to torture it. She never thought of denying it until Count Gismond strode out from among the crowd. Then she knew that she was saved. She had never seen his face before but at first view she felt assured that God had come to meet Satan. Count Gismond strode to Gauthier, gave him the lie, and smote the perjurer with a blow that wrote in blood the verdict of the assembly on his face.

What gladdens her most now, as she

tells the story, is that she enjoyed the very heart of the joy, the expression in Count Gismond's face, of perfect, unalloyed trust in her innocence. Gauthier's motives were as open to him as a printed book. Gismond lost no time in putting on his armor and used no sleight of sword, but, open-breasted, drove his weapon into the breast of the false knight, until, cleaving, he clove out the truth, which done he dragged Gauthier, dying, to her feet, and commanded him to confess to her that he had lied, lest God's second death should prove worse than this first. Gauthier made the confession and breathed his last. Then Count Gismond, kneeling to her, asked what her heart still holds too sacred to repeat. Over her head he flung his arm against the world, telling her that their home lay to the south many a mile. They walked forth amid the applause of the multitude, never to return.

As the Countess concludes her story, the Count and his two boys come up, when she asks him if he has brought home her falcon, and she tells him she has been interesting her friend by relating to her how

many birds the tercel had struck since last May.

This little falsehood, thrown in at the very last, (to spare her husband's blushes) is one of those contradictions which Browning recognizes in character. He never leaves the thorn off from the rose-bush nor the worm-eaten leaf from the rose. In this poem he has sounded the depths of woman's indignation when she is unjustly suspected and of her gentleness and gratitude when she is trusted. He has shown how clearly "the unsuspecting eyes of honesty" look down through all sophistries into the heart of things. He has again portrayed the clairvoyance which is a part of noble natures, and that they can reason with the same certainty from intuitions as can a mathematician from quantities whose values are given. An expression in the face is a fact which speaks as plainly as a written oath. He has illustrated again the trustfulness which is a distinguishing characteristic of noble natures. If the countess had been as base as Gauthier depicted her, such a trust as Gismond's would have developed her into a being worthy of it. If she had

been as guilty as Gauthier charged her with being, it still would have been Gismond's commission in the name of common decency to slay Gauthier for his impudence and presumption in bringing a woman before a crowd to overwhelm her on account of a crime he himself had invited her into being guilty of; and if Gauthier had reported her guilt privately, it would still have been Gismond's knightly privilege to slay him for betraying a fatherless and motherless young girl, as well as to resent the injustice and insolence that dares to excuse in man what it condemns in woman. If she had been the ugliest of women, the most disagreeable and unattractive, the case would not have been altered. If Count Gismond had never married her, but had done the deed in the spirit of him who said, "Take your part with the perfect and abstract right, and trust to God to see that it shall prove the expedient," he would have been still more of a hero. It should have been a matter of justice with him instead an act of love.

The poem is said to be a creation of the imagination, but it closely resembles

the King Arthur tales and is one of a multitude of proofs of Browning's versatility of genius.

The countess is of the legendary type, pretty, innocent and simple. Her little conventional lie which ends the poem, is not her weakest point. Although noble enough to appreciate Gismond's courage, she shows her weakness when, mistaking gratitude for love, she falls into his arms because he has done only what was his duty.

"Porphyria's Lover," speaking from a mad-house cell, presents to our notice another woman in whose complex nature we see truth and falsity involved. The lover tells us that he sat alone in his humble cottage, with a breaking heart, listening to the sullen tempest which had torn down the elm trees and vexed the lake to its utmost, when Porphyria glided in. Straight she shut out the cold and the storm and kneeled before the cheerless grate until the cottage was warm; which done, she arose, laid aside her dripping cloak and soiled gloves, untied her hat and loosened her damp hair. At last she came and sat down by him, call-

ing his name. When he did not answer, she put his arm about her waist and drew his head down on to her bare, white shoulder, covering him with her golden hair while she told him how she loved him. She had left a gay feast and come through wind and rain to her poor, pale lover, although she was too weak and proud to dis sever the vain ties of worldly pride which held her from him, and give herself to him forever. As she sat by his side, he became aware that she worshipped him, and his heart grew proud with surprise while he debated within himself how to keep her thus always to himself and save her from degrading her pure affections by yielding to worldly ambitions. If he should take her life, she could not return to the gay world; so he wound her long yellow hair around her throat and strangled her. So far his actions are sane enough and so is his story, unless crime is always the result of insanity, as some hold. But from medical authorities we learn that strangling has a very different effect from that described by our madman, and from this point his insanity if he has any betrays itself. He opened

her laughing blue eyes and drew the little rosy head, made glad by the surprise of losing the world and gaining him, to his shoulder; thus they sat the whole night long and God did not rebuke him.

Porphyria's lover is not an impossible madman, though he shows unusually good logic (considering that he starts with false premises) for a person of deranged mind. There are artists among the insane who make correct sketches of landscape, and it is just possible that a man whose wits have gone astray might make a correct analysis of motives. Certainly Porphyria's portrait is true to life; she is typical of a large class of women, and just as large a class of men, who choose social position rather than affection. "If Porphyria's lover became insane very suddenly in consequence of her fickleness, he would probably have become insane for some other reason if that one had not existed. But if he had brooded a great while over his troubles," according to the best authority I can find, "the brain-function had become impaired and the exciting cause was external." The poet evidently does not intend to justify Por-

phyria's fickleness. If she had not the strength to make a complete sacrifice she should have stayed away altogether. Her one act of devotion, although prompted by kindness, was unpardonably weak if she was conscious of any reason why she should have remained away; and yet the poet makes it the highest expression of her better self.

The distinguishing characteristic of Domizia of the drama "Luria" is her improvableness. Her mind is open to new convictions, ready and glad to change a poor opinion for a good one. With her, contradiction means progress and loses its reproach. The progressive man can not always afford to be consistent, and his later life will of necessity conflict with his early years, as the strength of the aged oak contradicts the weakness of the sapling.

From falsehood and revenge as a beginning, Domizia reaches the point where she acts from a sense of justice, midway in her course, and finally attains to the self-forgetting magnanimity and benevolence whose wealth is love freely given, demanding no return.

If it is ever right for any one to cherish feelings of revenge, our poet has made it so for Domizia; he has made the case so strong in her favor that it is almost doubtful whether any other feeling than that of revenge could have been in the nature of things. She had seen her father, old and trained in the service of his country, bow down on his quiet, broken heart and die awe-struck and submissive when, instead of the expected wreath so bravely earned, came a strange blow; while one brother with a simple, honest soul passed in blind bewilderment to exile, never to return, and another was driven into suicide as the only way of getting his fair fame free from inexplicable charges and proving his loyalty.

With no love for Luria, the commander-in-chief of the Florentine Army, she stands by him and allows him to grow in affectionate attachment to her, in the hope that through him she shall reach and pierce the heart of Florence. Her hatred is so great that she could will the mother city dead, but trusts the Florentine nature to bring about self-destruction through constancy in wickedness; that

Florence, long proverbial for ingratitude, will renew her claims to that reproach by cheating Luria out of his honors; he is but a hireling Moor who will clutch the throat of the ungrateful city at the first outrage instead of dying mutely in forlorn obedience as did her patriotic sons. Domizia entirely undervalues Luria; she speaks with some pity, if not contempt or dislike, when she mentions his black face in contrast with the peerless brows and eyes which she had been wont to see in the Florentine camp in sunnier days. That he should hope to find gratitude in Italian eyes and an expression of sympathy in Italian faces in preference to triumphal arches or storied pillars, does not enter into her conception of his character. She judges him by selfish motives, and constantly sounds in his ears the promise of rewards and triumphs.

Because Luria loves Domizia and her influence over him is a power to be feared, Braccio, the commissary of Florence, who has been sent out as a spy on the commander, causes her to be placed as a spy over himself that he may not lose her from his sight a minute. He sees that she is

laboring to make Luria the instrument of her revenge, ever at his ear to prompt inordinate estimates of his worth and exorbitant belief in the reward awaiting him, that when the sure disappointment follows he shall show proportionable rage. The commissary has no faith in any philanthropy in human nature. It is natural, he believes, for every man to seek his own good at the whole world's cost, for it has ever come under his observation that to lead forth troops and stand as chiefs, yet render up the charge when perce returned, has proved too much for Florentine leaders, even the best and bravest of them. He has seen virtue on virtue fall away before ambition till Florence's self at last in bitterness, being forced to acknowledge such falls the natural end, has declared that in order to spare her sons further strife and herself greater disgrace, she would hereafter choose a foreigner as leader of her troops, and so set herself an easier task than the punishment of her own children for a rebellion which in a hireling chief would be a less crime. Braccio can not suppose it possible for an alien to hold the path from which his stanchest coun-

trymen have broken away, and so he manufactures evidence enough against Luria, from slight indiscretions on his part and from the fretful complainings of a deposed general, to arouse the suspicion of the Florentines, who call a council and hold a secret trial while Luria is bravely leading forth their troops to certain victory, dreaming of the peaceful days to come when the Florentines shall throng the streets in holiday attire and form bright groups in the shade of the Duomo. It will be his proud ambition, the only honor he shall crave, to walk and watch them leading their glad lives so different from the rough life of his native East; to see the calm studious heads come out once more and resume the arts, their inheritance from the eternal past. His heart thrills with the delight of feeling a soul grow within him, restricting the boundless unrest of his savage heart. Luria is warned by a friendly Moor that the Florentines, locked together like a knot of slippery snakes, tangled in hatred yet never doing harm to each other, will yet turn their fangs on him; and Tiburzio, the general of the enemy's forces, brings him an inter-

cepted letter from the commissary to the council at Florence, containing information intended to increase the suspicions already raised. Tiburzio begs him to leave the Florentines, who are dealing treacherously with him, and join the foe, since there are no ties of blood to bind him more to one city than to the other.

But Luria's magnanimity demands no return of faithfulness for the loyalty it gives. He tears the letter to pieces without reading it, that he may have no least temptation to desert the city of his adoption. During the days that they have been together, Domizia has lost no opportunity to show him how truly formidable he might become to Florence by acting in concert with the enemy; and after the decisive battle has been won and Luria demands to be informed of the contents of the letter, she exults that her predictions have proved prophetic. Luria's rebuke calls from her the confession that she had foreseen the ingratitude which would be his reward and had hoped for revenge through him. He tells her that she has the black Italian eyes which plead for a generosity he can not grant. He remem-

bers how often she has seemed inclined to break down the barriers of revenge and falsehood which Florence had caused God to build between them, but justice to himself demands that he shall be true to the disloyal ones. Since she is the secret enemy of Florence, he pardons but dismisses her. Luria is importuned once more by his Moorish friend to return to the unsuspecting open-hearted multitudes, in their native East; to let his heart have its way and feel glad to stand beneath God's close naked hand. He counsels him to take revenge, wide and deep, to live upon in feeling now and in remembrance in after years, instead of remaining the dupe of the Florentines. The personal feeling of revenge which has moved Domizia dies out as she contemplates the true greatness of Luria, to whom his own nobility is a secret, and she returns to urge him to act against Florence, not from low revenge or personal hatred nor from savage lust of power, but because it is the cause of humanity. If he keeps Florence in her evil way and encourages her sin, he is only working against the men to come; it is man's call for which

God shall judge him; for herself as a woman she no longer speaks, but for the common good. Luria soliloquizes over the various uses his friends are trying to put him to, no one of which answers his purpose, and his soliloquy is a revelation of the finest attributes Browning has painted into any character. Luria doubts not that it is well for his friends to wish to effect their own purposes through him, but asks himself what would be left himself after the exploits. Perchance a little pride upon his swarthy brow at having brought successfully the craft and power of Florence to bear against herself. But once the easy vengeance taken, beautiful Florence laid low, (not in her great works of art, her wondrous domes and towers and palaces—never even in imagination can he dream of that outrage) but low because shamed in her own eyes, what could be left for him who should do such an irreparable wrong? How strange, he thinks, that Florentines could so mistake him. He compares them to fretful children who feel wronged.

“Notable wrongs a smile makes up again.”

A great nature is always more suspicious of itself than of others, turning to find the wrong within that lies without, and so Luria blames himself since the Florentines gain nothing by punishing him. Wherefore, he queries, should he visit his own faults on them. If he ruin Florence, teach her friends mistrust and confirm her enemies in harsh belief, shall it console him that his Florentines walk with a sadder step, a graver face, when they find out their strange mistake,—they who took him with such frankness at the outset, made pictures of him and sang songs about his battles? Luria turns for guidance to the setting sun that has blessed the land the whole day long, lovely Florence with her hills and fields and olive-grounds. The great orb sinks from out the sky unmindful of the world's ungrateful children who blame him for rising too late or setting too soon. He does not turn in ire because of the wrong, and burn the earth that can not understand, but sinks to rise anew and find all eyes more ready and more disposed to watch and approve his work.

Luria, like Domizia's brother, has one

resource left whereby to vindicate his motives and prove his loyalty. He takes a phial from his breast and drinks the quiet remedy that shall ere midnight end his life and save Florence the disgrace of condemning her benefactor to suffer an undeserved punishment. Domizia comes to him again. Her soul has waked up to a full consciousness of Luria's spirit, and with far more to forgive than he, in the triple wrong to her family, the last wish for revenge or even for personal justice has died away in the past. All the tenderness of her woman's nature which had been denied expression through the loss of father and brothers, has been converted into an energy of benevolence surpassing Luria's own. It is always noble to respect the convictions in others which one can not understand, but it is a far nobler trait to be able to put one's mind into a receptive condition so that it can feel the same emotions. In this particular respect Domizia excels Luria. She is good because teachable, good because capable of becoming good. The susceptible, receivable, teachable quality in woman or in man is the quality which distinguishes the

human from the brute. It is a pitiable spirit that cries "Words should never break!" It is a principle of moral philosophy as well as a principle of physical philosophy that any energy can be converted into any other energy. As friction can be converted into heat and heat into light and light into lightning, so that energy which produces the heat of angry passions may be converted into the energy which produces the lightning of noble deeds. It is not heat but a lack of heat that can not be converted into electricity. It is weakness and not strength that can not meet falsehood and revenge and convert them into an energy for good. It is not goodness but a lack of goodness that has no philosophical faith in the better side of human nature. This faith was Luria's and becomes multiplied in the heart of Domizia. She recognizes how inexhaustibly the spirit may grow; how having reached one object, erewhile sought with all its powers, as if it were a wall at the world's end with naught beyond to live for, new and greater objects extending further evolve new capabilities, and behold! the soul has a new world. Do-

mizia's character greatens to the close of the drama. She fears that Luria shall see only selfish impulse in her past life when he acknowledges the use of intense feeling such as hers by gently chiding her for speaking against her own nature. He has seen such natures in his own East where men are nearer God, who glows above them with scarce an intervention, pressing close His soul over theirs; where men feel God but know Him not through painful reason; he has too weakly stood by his own nature, which should have directed him to write God's message in man's words and so give thought's character and permanence to the too transitory feeling, the East's gift to her children.

Domizia assures him that he has achieved a higher mission in re-teaching loyalty and simpleness to the Florentines, whose knowledge of such virtues had become a mere tradition; and fearing that his words imply that he shall punish Florence, she implores him to spare the city.

It would be an easy way to dispose of Domizia if we should call her portrait a picture of retaliation, only a background figure, and pass on; but the background

of a picture is as well worth studying as the foreground if the picture is worth studying at all. Many people object to the study of backgrounds for the reason that they are not intended by the artist to attract any attention. Even Browning students are sometimes so careless as to say that the women of Browning's poems are often too unimportant to notice closely, giving Eulalia, Clara and Domizia as examples.

A great artist was once advised to paint his foreground and then hand his pictures over to students, to daub in the backgrounds in order to expedite his work, but he made this significant reply: "He who can paint my backgrounds can paint my foregrounds." Nobody understands the great significance of backgrounds better than Browning. In "Sordello," we have one human soul as a foreground, a startling revelation of dramatic soul-action. But what a background! The whole evolution of mankind, from its lowest state to its highest thought, a whole world of landscape, with its mysteries of tangled vines, sunken morasses, dim corridors engraven in Arabic designs,

and the passions and hopes and fears of a surging mass of living people.

It is because Browning is so great an artist that he paints such wondrous backgrounds, and it is because his backgrounds are so complete that he is so "obscure." It is like standing on a high mountain peak and trying to take in all the scenery at once, to master Browning's back-ground scenes. Surely no hero has ever been painted with more magnificent figures in the background than has Luria, and not the least among them is Domizia.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOST CHORDS.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!"

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE Duchess of "The Flight of the Duchess" is a young girl who comes to us and goes from us surrounded by mysteries which our poet never intended should be fathomed. Like a picture of the "impressionist" order, its colors are massed in regardless of detail, and we are left to see a large meaning at a distance where close inspection discloses only rough brush-sweeps. The Duchess is

"the smallest lady alive,
Made in a piece of nature's madness,
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness
That over-filled her, as some hive
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees,
Is crowded with its safe merry bees."

She comes forth from a convent to be made the wife of the Duke of the great wild Northland; she has never before seen the man whom she is to wed, and at first sight her face stops its play as a glad sky loses its smile when sullied by the north wind.

The Duke is a superficial, unsympathetic person, who places an undue importance on his travels and is "struck with himself" on account of his rank. All that his forefathers have been without knowing it, he would fain seem to be without being it. He has passed his early life abroad under the supervision of his mother, "the sick, tall yellow Duchess," by whom he has been thoroughly drilled in the proprieties of life. He comes back to his castle and revives all the worn out usages of the past, his particular affectation being the chase. In Paris he had heard the Mid-Age praised and his own land called the Land of Lays, so he conducts his hunting parties strictly according to precedents, making sure that each detail is modeled after some stricture laid down by old poets or old painters, or some authentic tradition. Even his marriage is

a part of the same plan, and his wife who, like a wild bird, is a tireless, active creature, is assigned the unwelcome task of sitting *thus* and standing *thus*, to see or to be seen, at the proper place, in the proper minute, according to prescribed rules. It is a bright spring day when she arrives at the castle, but nevertheless the serfs are clad in thick hunting clothes fit for winter because the Duke has a mind to cut a figure on the occasion. The serf who relates the story is so fortunate as to be the one who leads her horse, and because he pats the animal, he receives such a look of thanks from her eyes as makes his heart beat faster, and from that point we begin to speculate on the almost lover-like relation which seems to exist between them, thenceforward to the end of the poem.

She inquires the name of each bird as it flies past, and in dismounting, places her small foot on the hand which had patted her horse, when the Duke, as if to rebuke her, bending low like a man with his back disjointed, (according to old pictures of such occasions), steps forward and a little to one side to welcome her

with his grandest smile, while his mother stands in stately coldness in the rear, "like a wind to the Nor'ward."

The shock at meeting such cold formalities soon wears off, and the little lady goes smiling as if protesting that such mimicry were all a jest against God, who intended that she should ever be glad in His sight. The serfs are delighted with her amiable nature; she brings life to the whole scene and has the very great gift of being easily pleased. They rejoice in her willful infractions of the iron rules laid upon her by the Duke and his mother, and are amused to witness the self-satisfaction with which the two let her advise and criticise, in her childlike way, bearing it complacently with the delight which an artificer would feel if after contriving a clock-work image it should motion to strike him. To rebuke her would not be contemptuous enough. So the little lady grows silent, and the Duke considers it a piece of spite, and pities himself as being a much abused man.

Early in autumn he consults his calendar of proprieties to find what pleasure he may indulge in without infringing on

established customs, and finds that it will be no treason to the Middle Age to indulge in a hunting party. Each man shall say a prayer to St. Hubert on mounting his stirrups for so "It hath been writ." The "properest" chirrup is duly considered and even the most orthodox way of encouraging the dogs is weighed in solemn council. Where old poems and old paintings fail to disclose the all-important information, ancient tapestries and panel decorations are consulted.

Blessed is the serf whose back aches with the jerkin his sire was wont to wear, and yet more blessed he who tugs on his grandsire's trunkhose without a murmur. Broad brimmed hats, slouching before and behind, loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson, shall comfort the deer with the hope that they are slain by genuine hunters instead of murderers.

The men's parts being adjusted, the Duke's mind is troubled lest they have neglected some record which might assign the Duchess a share in the business, and so

"After much laying of heads together
Somebody's cap got a notable feather
By the announcement with proper unction
That he had discovered the lady's function;

‘When horns wind a mort and deer is at siege,
‘Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,
‘And with water to wash the hands of her liege
‘In a clean ewer with a fair toweling
‘Let her preside at the disemboweling.’ ”

When the Duke signifies to the lady her part in the anticipated pleasure, she declines the honor and the lord of the castle stands in a sultry smother stricken dumb with amazement. He turns her over to his yellow mother to be taught what is decorous and lawful, and she, after visiting the tempest of her wrath upon the offender, sweeps out of her presence followed by the Duke, who hopes that his face has the austere expression of the Emperor Nero.

At sunrise the company muster, and the Duke rides out in perfect sulkiness, for he has had that sort of a pain which portends evil. As he looks around uneasily the sun drives the fog asunder and a troop of gypsies comes up out of the valley to meet him like an army of new-hatched spiders. They stop when they reach the castle moat, save one, an old witch who had been accustomed, as each autumn season came around, to pay the Duke a visit, each time taking an oath that it would be the last. She is bent almost

double with age, her face is hairy and her worn out eyes sunken in their sockets. She sidles up to the Duke, while her fingers are twitching at her belt for her purse that she may pouch her annual stipend. At first the Duke is too sulky to vouchsafe her the least notice, but when he contrasts her loathsome squalor with the flower-like delicacy of the lady he has left at home he bends down and instructs her to visit the Duchess that the foolish wife may have a taste of what real life and sorrow are, and so grow wiser. The crone assents with hearty good-will, promising to frighten the lady thoroughly. He tosses the witch a purse, puts her in charge of the serf, the narrator of the story, and rides out followed by his train.

The serf turns toward the castle accompanied by the witch, when he is amazed at an astonishing change which has come over her. She has shot up a head in stature, and walks with stately grace. Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak has become such a mantle as a Persian woman wears; instead of tatters, gold coins glitter on the edges and her eyes have grown "live and aware." The serving wo-

man, Jacynth, who is sweet as a June rose and beloved of the serf, rejoices to admit any one to the silent little lady, and the serf remains in the balcony while the witch and the maid go into the presence together. As Jacynth does not return, he pushes the lattice aside that he may satisfy his curiosity, and sees her lying in a rosy sleep along the floor with her head toward the entrance as if keeping watch; while on the seat of state sits the gypsy woman, like a queen, with face and head downbent over the lady's head and face, for the Duchess is coiled at her feet like a child at ease intently listening. Her upturned face meets the face of the witch whose eyes have grown wondrous and large, and whose hands are moving in rhythmic measures. The serf is alarmed, and his first impulse is to spring to the rescue, but he is stopped by the expression in the lady's face. It seems to him that her eyes are drinking life's pure fire; life that is filling her until in its redundancy it ripples through her very hair as it swerves backward, loose and abundant, over each shoulder, showing the white, curving throat. The very tresses seem

to move in measure, and her cheeks burn and her eyes brighten while she listens. The gypsy's language is a strange one, but the meaning of its music reaches him as mind understands mind through clasped hands.

The crone is tracing the lady's relation to the gypsy tribe through the veins that meet on her brow and part again, the rapid mystic mark of her own people.

When the Duchess has bravely endured her probation, the witch promises her that she shall fall at last breathless with the thrill of freedom into their arms. She shall know

“How love is the only good in the world.”

The crone counsels her to break away from the thrall about her and take the love of the tribe, for it is their life which is thrown at her feet, that she may step into light and joy. They will employ all their powers to satisfy her nature's wants, whether she is the tree that props the plant, or the plant that clings to the tree. If she be the tree, some one shall cover her with blossoms and leaves, fix his heart's fruit for her garland crown, and

die on her boughs without causing one leaf of hers to suffer. If, on the other hand, she is the one to adore, giving her wondrous self to the sway of a stronger nature, her daily life, whether one of peace or disquiet, shall be the object of loving solicitude. Whether she keep the path or swerve from it, whether she cause them shame or pride, she shall always find them beside her, either glad or sorry, but never indifferent. And when at last old age comes upon her, she shall retire with a heart hoarded with glad memories.

The gypsy's words change into rapid music that the serf can not translate into words, and just as the song is sweetest the charm vanishes; he comes to his senses, and comprehends that the crone has been bewitching the lady. He makes a spring forward, but is stopped as by a stroke of palsy, for the lady's face has become so happy and beautiful that he can only wait her commands; not that there is any commanding, for God has granted that such little signs shall serve his wild creatures to tell one another their desires, that words are useless. He sees the glory of

her eye, and her whole being expanding, and silently precedes her to the court-yard, where he saddles the very palfrey he was patting when he won her first smile. He helps her mount, with the witch behind her. The gypsy's eyes have sunk back and her stature is again shortened, the soul having returned into its body like a sword sheathed in its scabbard.

With a voice rendered unsteady by excessive feeling the serf murmurs to the lady something to the effect that he shall always be in readiness to serve her if it shall please God for her to need him, when her face looked down on him with an expression which yet lingers as a crown upon his head.

Some day, when the Duke lies slain by a fierce onslaught of hiccup, the faithful old retainer will saddle his horse and ride off into the unknown land to find out what fortunes have attended the little lady. Age is nothing to him, he must hurry a little faster, that's all. He hopes at last to find a snug corner where he can sleep until the last trumpet wakes him to a world where there is no more throwing of pearls before swine.

The philosophy of this dramatic lyric is often lost sight of in the interest taken in the fate of the little lady, and many theories have come to cluster about her, among which are the following; that the witch was not a woman at all, but a lover who stole her away; that the witch was her mother or a Persian princess who rescued her to the tribe from which she had been stolen; that the story of the witch's music was a mere fancy of the serf, himself being her lover and wishing to invent some excuse for getting her away from her unhappy circumstances.

The lesson of the poem is entirely independent of the fate of the lady. It is a satire on those conventionalities of life which would rob people of their individuality, take away the right of living out one's own nature, and subject God-given instinct and reason to the intolerance or the cowardliness that can not or dare not endure an idea which is not cut by some prescribed pattern.

The woman who has had "The Worst of It" thinks that she is going to have the best of it; she has left her husband, on discovering the corruptness of his mind,

that she may escape his evil influence, and he sends up a series of wails at her faithlessness. He confesses that he had been a "speckled beast" of society, bearing in his face the unwholesome record of his life, a record open to her inspection. When he found his white swan he had caught its whiteness, and the dull turned bright again. Her faithlessness he considers a crime for which she will forfeit heaven. He prays her to be sorry for this sin, for it is an offense against God. Why should she want the perfection on this earth which the angels vaunt? He hides away from her austere purity here, but in heaven if he meets her he shall not turn his face. This woman is the most thoroughly misunderstood character of Browning's poems. She is of the same order as the woman of "The Inn Album," a woman who will not subject her goodness to any trial for fear it can not stand the strain.

In "Bifurcation" the same problem, that of duty *versus* love, is presented for our consideration. Side by side are the tombs of two lovers. On hers we find an inscription which assures us that she loved him

but that her reason bade her prefer duty to love, and with the confidence hidden in her heart

“That heaven repairs what wrong earth’s journey did,”

she chose the severe path.

The inscription on his tomb tells us that he loved her, but that she bade him farewell, since the homely sward of duty called her away from him. She would meet him above, where both roads join: let him continue constant to the path whereon he was planted. But because man must needs move, he had gone astray because the star was gone whereby to step securely. Every stone had proved a stumbling-block, and had brought him to confusion.

We are asked to finish the inscription by writing sinner on one stone and saint on the other, and there can be no doubt in our minds as to which the poet considers the sinner.

“*Le Byron de nos Jours*” furnishes us with a woman of keen insight, who chats in a girlish way of the sea and the rocks, all the while that her intuition is searching and reading the thoughts of an elderly

poet to whom she is attracted, and who is balancing in his mind the advantages and drawbacks of a marriage with her. He is bent, lamed and wigged, and noted for verse and worse; while the young girl, beautiful as a mountain-apple, loves him with the love of an undeveloped mind open and eager for knowledge. Ten years later she meets him and gives him an analysis of the thoughts which he had had about her while studying her in order to decide as to whether she was the machine that would suit his purposes, and tells him that the devil laughed in his sleeve at the prudent decision which destroyed four souls; he has allied himself to a dancing-girl over whose sprain he cries "Pooh!" while she has married a man whose interest is centered in whist. She has lost her share of the sole spark from God's life, and the poet with all his prudence and lore has proved himself a fool.

The Mary Wollstonecraft of Browning's short poem is the woman whom biographers love to criticise, but not the person one would picture to himself in reading her "Vindication" published in 1793, a

dignified plea for the higher education of women. Browning takes the usual view of her case, but makes her wonderful genius an outgrowth of her love for Fuseli.

Naturally timid, she grows courageous, and "much amiss in the head" she learns drawing, painting, music and grapples easily with Greek plays, all for his sake. Strong in heart, with more than will, with what seems a power to accomplish great things, she sees her abilities destroyed because the chord which might have made her life's harmony a powerful one is lost.

The Palma of "Sordello" is a blue-eyed golden-haired maiden, whose life interests cluster around, and are a sacrifice to, one who is out of harmony with his age; a man whose early years are selfishly spent in dreaming of subjecting the world to himself, and his later years in morbid imaginations of an impossible philanthropy. Sordello's life is a conflict between his relation to himself and his relation to the world; a conflict which dissipates his influence so that he is far from being a benefactor to his race; an

emotion which saps his vitality and brings to Palma no adequate return for the generous response which she makes to his call for her love. Palma is the daughter of an Italian podesta, whose office it is to rule impartially two great factions. She is educated in political intrigues by her step-mother, the most scheming of Browning's women, and is betrothed for political ends by her father to a man in whom she has no interest, but she adroitly frustrates their plans in favor of Sordello.

Palma is described as "passion's votaress;" her energies neither develop nor take direction until she meets the "out-soul" for whom she has always looked, when her latent powers spring forth as by a miracle. She is at once a shrewd business woman, and plans not only to get possession of her father's estates but to create Sordello chief ruler of Lombardy. Her ambitions for him grow with the possibilities, but when her greatest hopes have reached the point of fruition he casts the badge which would place him at the head of Italy beneath his feet and dies;—

"what he should have been
Could be, and was not—that one step too mean
For him to take,—we suffer at this day
Because of."

It is enough that Palma is true to so uncomfortable a lover and that she finds a triumph in his lifeless eyes as she presses a kiss upon his heart, although he had stood ready to sacrifice her on the altar of public benefaction. Notwithstanding Palma acts from self-interest, she illustrates the fact that those people who follow the leadings of their own natures, in choosing what is best for themselves, are at the same time most apt unconsciously to choose what will confer upon mankind the greatest benefit which it is within their capacity to bestow.

While Sordello's heart bursts with sorrow because he can not accomplish for the world's good the very thing that would bring it the greatest grief, Palma's unpretentious common sense leads right to the point where the world's hope is struggling to burst forth; so surely do those who are true to near duties serve the human race better than those who place a greater value on man's relation to mankind than to his immediate obligations and environments.

CHAPTER XV.

COMPARATIVE ESTIMATES.

“Come back with me to the first of all,
Let us lean and love it over again—
Let us now forget and then recall,
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall.”

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN his relative estimate of men and women, Browning has held a very even balance; he does not make sex an excuse for a low standard of morality in man, nor a reason for senseless timidity in woman. If he makes any distinction it is in favor of woman. He tells us through the lips of Don Juan that man is a full-blown ingrate, taking all and giving nought; while the woman who takes all and gives nought is like the rivulet which goes headlong to its death in the sea; that to win man's regard one must stoop to his level, wear beast's clothing and crawl on all fours to seem his fellow-beast,—but if one

has to deal with womankind, he must cast the vile disguise away, try the truth clean opposite to creeping and crawling, stand forth all man and lay claim to whatever inheritance of good he may have actually on the earth or prospectively in heaven. The keynote of all of Browning's poems is summed up in his preface to *Sordello*, "The development of the soul: little else is worth study," and he as often paints the development of woman's soul as that of man's. He seems to regard this life as a stopping place where each soul meets the complement which develops it as far as this earth may. His poems are often of too amorous a nature to meet the approbation of delicate-minded people, and yet even they acknowledge that he has made this defect the beginning of soul-consciousness, the dawn of a realization of God's verity. The poem "*Cristina*" particularly illustrates the awakening power which comes to the soul through combining with its own strength the soul of another, though the latter may pass on its way stolid and unaware.

There have at times been ominous signs of rebellion in Browning Sections to the

effect that our poet has under-estimated woman, in that he has not elaborated her character as carefully as that of man. That this is true I will not deny; but in his portraits of his wife, of Balaustion, of Anael and of Pompilia, we must say that never has poet estimated woman more highly or put greater truth into his outlines or finer modeling into his colors. If all the rest of his women were manikins, he has redeemed himself in these.

The rebellion does not stop here but goes on to say that "he considers woman just a stuff for man to try his soul's strength on." Neither is this to be denied, for he considers everything in life only a stuff to try the soul's strength on. If he treats woman as just a means whereby man may reach his highest possibilities, he fully returns the compliment and makes man a stuff whereby woman may develop the muscles of her soul as well; and he does it quite respectfully too, of necessity making those people who grow by using others, mean to begin with, but he traces them to some altitude above the starting-point. However strongly Browning may advocate that woman's

love and faith are agents necessary to the salvation of man's soul, or to the perfection of his manhood, he does not make her subjection to him, or her dependence, or her enslavement, the gospel of his salvation. I have not found any instance in which he recommends injustice to her as a means by which man may save his soul for the next world or increase his happiness in this. If Browning admits that the soul is so precious that everybody and everything on earth are mere substances for its use and development,—he certainly does not teach that woman is a factor to be used in those meaner problems that do not involve soul-growth. He shows no intention of treating her as a stuff to serve an interest that is only temporal, and is certainly a long way ahead of those men who are egotistic enough and comical enough to assign woman her sphere. In no place is man so ludicrous and amusing as when doing that.

The spirit of that great one whom our poet called wife, finds expression in every poem. After he has faced his incompetent critics, (the soot-boys “as sweeps out the chimbley”) and has begun

to play and sing his songs of triumph, the one string which sounds "Love" and gives his lyre its harmony, is snapped in twain; but the homely cricket which he meets in the common walks of life perches on the vacant place in his crippled lyre to repeat the tones she sang so sweetly, or utter in due time the notes she left unsung; thus through his verse her music is translated in louder and deeper tones.

"Earth has gained by one man more
And the gain of earth must be Heaven's gain too."

THE END.



